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# GYPSIES OF BRITAIN





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**A BOOK OF BRITISH WADERS**

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**PROGRAMME FOR AGRICULTURE (*Editor*)**

# GYPSIES OF BRITAIN

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEIR HISTORY

*by*

BRIAN VESEY-FITZGERALD,

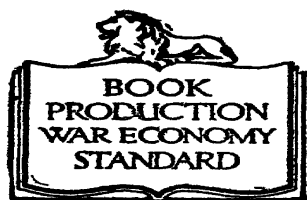
F.L.S., F.R.E.S., M.B.O.U.

(Editor of *The Field*)



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KI

AUGUSTUS JOHN, O.M., R.A.

O SHERAND 'PARL O ROMANĖ JUNIMÁSKO MALIBEN  
THA KI SÁKON KOMONÉNDI TE KAMEN I ROMANICHEŁ TRUSHAL  
O THEM SÂB

THA KI

AMOS CHUREN

ROMANÓ THA RAI, ODÂ-KAI MUKDÁS MAN TE KISTÉŁ  
PESKO ΧΥREDO GRAI KANA CHAVORÓ SHOMAS, THA ACHDÁS  
MIRO PHAL POS-TE MULÁS BISH-THA-SHOV BERSHA PALÁL

THA KI

JAMES ARIGHO

KAKKAVIÉNGERO AVRÍ ΧΙΝDE-THEMÉSTI, THILIMÁNGERO, GILI-  
ÉNGERO THA BOSHIMÁNGERO, LACHO PARAMISHÉNGERO, ZORALO  
SOVEΧERIMÁNGERO, ODÂ-KAI GOZHVERDÁS MAN DOSTA TRUSHAL  
CHERIKLÉNGE THA STÂR-PIRENGRÉNGE DROMÁ AR'I VESHENDI  
THA'I BÂRIÉNDI, THA SIKADÁS MAN SAR TE TARDÁ I MURENÉNGE  
MACHÉ AVRÍ BITI PANIÉNDI THA TE LA CHOROΧANÉS O BÂRO  
SHOSHOI THA'I BÂRI KANI PENGĖ GARADĖ VODRÉNDĖ, THA TE  
HAIÁVÁ 'DOLA MURSHÉN THA JUVIÉN TE PHIRÉN OPRÉ O 'DROLANĖ  
DROMÁ

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I HAVE described this book as an introduction to the history of the British Gypsies. The dictionary defines history as : " A written statement of what is known : an account of that which exists or has existed : a record : a description." This then is an introduction to what is known about the British Gypsies, not merely to what I know about them. No gorgio man or woman has ever known the Gypsies, has ever known even one Gypsy, through and through. But a considerable number of gorgio men and women have, from time to time, acquired a deep insight into various aspects of Gypsy life and thought. The *Journal* of the Gypsy Lore Society is the treasure house in which all trustworthy knowledge of the Gypsies—not only of those to be found in Britain but of those to be found anywhere in the world—is stored. The *Journal* is, in fact, the source-book of all Gypsy history. No one who would write a book about Gypsies with any claim to being authoritative can afford to ignore it. I desire to stress here, as I have stressed many times in the pages that follow, the extensive use I have made of the *Journal*. That will be obvious to all the members of the Society. It may not be sufficiently obvious to the majority of my readers, some of whom may not know of the *Journal*, and I do not want there to be any misapprehension. At the same time I must also stress that the opinions expressed are my own, unless explicitly stated to be those of somebody else.

I cannot possibly make any adequate return for the many kindnesses I have received during the preparation of this book, nor can I possibly in these days of paper shortage publish the names of all those who in one way or another have helped me during the months I have been working on it. I hope that all those whose names are not mentioned will understand that they have been omitted for no other

reason and that my gratitude to them is none the less. Particularly am I indebted to Miss Dora Yates, Secretary to the Gypsy Lore Society, who has helped in innumerable ways, often I fear at considerable personal inconvenience, and who has read the book in manuscript and made many valuable suggestions and criticisms ; and to Mr. T. W. Thompson and Mr. Eric Winstedt, fellow members of the Gypsy Lore Society, the former for his great generosity in allowing me to draw so fully upon his vast knowledge gathered over many years, and the latter for his kindness in answering letters that must often have bored him immeasurably. In addition my thanks are due to Dr. N. L. Jackson, Fred Norrish, R. H. Ferry, D. St. Leger Gordon, Alice Court, Rev. I. R. Sholto Douglas, C. L. G. Smith, F. R. Hanson, Henry Clapp Smith (New York), A. P. Barranikov (Moscow), Mrs. Douglas M. Baily (Toledo, U.S.A.), R. J. Macnamara, Rev. H. Purefoy FitzGerald, Sheila Maginnis, Rev. A. A. McKenna, S.J., B. K. Ritchie, Ann Scott, B. F. D. Ashton, John Lee, Kathleen Hodgson, John Venables, Peter King, M. Lloyd-Davies, Mary Mitchell, Brigid Regan, Patrick O'Flaherty, Rev. D. M. M. Bartlett, H. T. Bent, Thomas Hannay, H. J. Massingham, Mary O'Leary, Arthur O'Leary, Frank Parsons, John Myers, Edward Blackstone, A. McC. Paul, C. E. A. de Salis, Ll. D. Boyles, Catherine Smallman, C. Henry Warren, Elsie Waddon, Emrys Evans, John Stratton, Mrs. Archie Bell, Cynthia Craddock, Henry D. Baumer (Chicago), Duncan Scott, Mark Beaumont, L. H. D. Pennyfeather, Ferdinand Huth, and Roberta Wren. I am also indebted, of course, to a large number of Gypsies, who would, I am sure, prefer to be nameless. My friend, F. H. Dickson, has once again undertaken the laborious task of reading the proofs. Finally, my thanks, my very sincere thanks, are due to one or two landowners of whose property I have occasionally made rather free use in the interests of learning, and especially to the one who caught me, but after some discussion let me go—in return for a tip or two.

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## INTRODUCTION

I AM no Romani Scholar. I should like to make that clear straight away in view of the fact that this is a book about Gypsies, and it appears to be the fashion to describe anyone who writes a book about Gypsies, or even puts Gypsies into a book, as a modern George Borrow and a Romany Rye. I am not a *Romano Rai*—in the sense of a Romani scholar at any rate—but I hope I may properly be regarded as one of the “affectionatos.”

People become interested in Gypsies for a variety of reasons. Many are first attracted by the halo of false romance that some writers have given them. This halo disappears pretty quickly and with it, as a rule, all interest in Gypsies. But there are yet some who remain interested after the halo has gone, and for them interest takes many forms. Some devote their attention to the past history of the race : some to the study of their language and its philological problems : some find their chief interest in tracing family pedigrees : some collect vocabularies, some folk tales, some music : some find their chief interest in Gypsies' customs : and some are content to leave all such matter to the specialists, and are satisfied with the simple contact, are happy in knowing a very lovable people.

If I belong to any one of these classes, it is to the last. But I have never sought out the Gypsy folk just because they are Gypsies or just because I happen to be interested in them. I have only sought their company when I have come across them accidentally. My interest in them and such knowledge of them as I possess has been incidental to my interest in natural history and the life of the countryside generally, and my contacts with them have been for the most part in the course of wanderings that were primarily concerned with birds and beasts and insects. My knowledge, such as it is, of their language has come just because I happen to pick up languages easily—I was born bi-lingual, and this no doubt is a help—and not because I

have ever set out to collect a vocabulary from any Gypsy. There was, by the way, a time when I thought that because I had just sufficient *Romani* to *rakker* with the Gypsy in his *tan* that I knew something about him and his language. That was before I came across Dr. Sampson's great book and the *Journal* of the Gypsy Lore Society. I know better now. I am learning his language. No matter how fluently I can chatter when I am with Romanies—and I can rub along—each fresh number of the *Journal* shows me very clearly how much I have yet to learn ; which is very good for me. But I must confess that the language as it appears in Dr. Sampson's monograph and in the pages of the *Journal*—a beautifully balanced, constructed and accentuated language—sometimes seems to me very far removed from the speech I hear by the Gypsy fireside. In point of fact it is not—even though I not infrequently find it incomprehensible without the aid of a vocabulary and a good deal of intuition : what makes the two appear so different is that the one is a spoken and the other a written language. *Romani* is the language of an unlettered people : it was never a written language. It has only been recorded in fairly recent times, and only very recently has one mode of transcription come to be universally accepted—that used by the late John Sampson, the greatest of all *Romane Raia*. Sampson used the following alphabet :

a ā b ċ d đ e ě f g γ h i j k k' χ l ḷ m  
n ŋ o p p' r ȝ s š t t' þ u v w Ẃ y z ž

Each of those symbols indicates a particular sound, and no other. There is no possibility of mistake. And quite obviously this is a much better method of taking down speech than the old phonetic method, since people are very apt to spell words differently to indicate the same sounds. All the same I have not used it in this book. Such *Romani* words as I have used (and I have deliberately reduced them to the minimum) I have spelt phonetically. Though this will not appeal to the gypsologist (in any case this book is not written for him) it will, I fancy, be simpler for

the general reader, who will, I believe, find *gorgio* easier to read than *gǎŋo* and *hochay* than *χḁčē*, to take but two random examples.

Invariably when I talk about Gypsies—no matter to whom, individuals or clubs or societies or what not—I am asked how I first came to know Gypsies. I did not, rather unfashionably perhaps, make my first acquaintance with them in the pages of George Borrow. Indeed, I first read *Lavengro* when I was sixteen, and I first knew a Gypsy when I was seven or thereabout.

Then an itinerant harper came through the little country town where we lived. Father liked the harp and he liked characters too, and for several days the man came and played his harp outside our house. Father talked to him, and I would go out and listen, and the man would always talk to me also. I do not know what his name was, but I can remember him and his harp very clearly, more clearly than anyone or anything in my childhood. He was, I think, a very tall man. At least I remember him as being very tall, but he may not have been, for memory enlarges hugely. (At my public school, in my first year, I had an enormous admiration for the head of my house, a huge man, who was also head of the school and a forward in the School XV. I met him years afterwards and found to my astonishment that I was a good head the taller and much larger physically). But of some things I am as certain now as I was then. If I close my eyes now I can see him as clearly as if I was again standing before him and longing to pluck at the strings of his harp. He was very dark, dark skinned and with black hair. His hair was so long that it fell over his coat collar and he had a long black moustache. He had very black eyes with queer orangey pupils. They had a light in them that seemed somehow to be behind the eye itself. They never frightened me, but they did attract me strangely, even though they seemed to look deep inside me. He wore a black billycock hat and a sort of frock coat, and a handkerchief round his neck. It was a bright yellow handkerchief, and it had red spots on it. I

was very impressed by that handkerchief. And the second year he came he gave it to me when he moved on. I have long since lost it, but it was a treasure for many years. It was from this old man (I knew he was an old man then, which now I come to think about it is rather surprising in view of the fact that his hair was black and my father's was white) that I learned my first words of Romani. I knew *diklo* meant handkerchief, and *mishto* meant good. Probably I knew many more words then too, but I cannot now remember them.

My father was a great walker. And from the time that I was eight he would take me with him on many of his walks. Sometimes we would take sandwiches and walk from the house and back again, covering a circle of country, and sometimes we would go by train to some wayside station and walk home by field paths and tracks. I did my first ten-mile walk when I was eight and when I was twelve I first did my twenty miles in the day. On these walks father would show me birds and animals, and interpret for me the sounds and sights of the countryside, but though he had a vast knowledge of birds and animals he was very much more interested in people, and he would stop and talk to anyone he could get to talk to him. I doubt if there was a farm labourer within a ten-mile radius of home whom father did not know. There could have been few cottages within that radius at which at some time or another we did not stop, few at which we did not at some time or another have a cup of tea or a glass of milk. Father collected people much as other men collect birds' eggs or stamps. And since he had knocked about the world a good bit he was not an unpopular visitor anywhere. Among the people we got to know on these walks were tramps and several families of Gypsies, who travelled the area. I had my first food in a Gypsy encampment with father when I was nine. I had my first meal alone in a Gypsy encampment when I was eleven. That was near Maidenhead, and I was playing truant from my preparatory school. There were a good many Gypsies around

Maidenhead in those days, and I spent many a stolen hour of a half-holiday in their company. Indeed when I was thirteen I was very deeply in love with a Gypsy girl. I cannot, now, remember who she was, but her name was Miranda. So, too, at my public school, where on Sundays we were allowed to go for walks by ourselves if we wished to do so. I got then to know several families who visited the area—Lees, Coopers, Stanleys, Scamps, Deightons, Drapers, Patemans, and can remember the names well. At sixteen I was more than a little attracted by Helen Scamp. So it was, very gradually and without motive, I got to know Gypsies. I learned my words of Romani by the simple method of listening. I learned one or two other things as well.

Another question I am invariably asked is : “ Aren’t you frightened ? I wouldn’t like to get mixed up with Gypsies, a nasty cut-throat-looking lot.” Well, people do frighten me as a rule : things frighten me much more. I think I can honestly say that I have never been frightened by a real Gypsy, for the simple reason that a real Gypsy has never tried to frighten me. I have been frightened once or twice by *diddikais* (half-castes) and more than once by tramps. In particular do I remember a *diddikai* named Best, whom I met near Nottingham. He was a hugely squat man with the largest and heaviest shoulders I have ever seen on a man, huge penthouse brows, a badly broken nose and a heavy jaw. His hands were hairy and square. I remember well noticing that his fingers were all the same length, the little fingers being abnormally long. He could not have stood above five feet four and he must have weighed a good fourteen stone, and none of it was fat. But the frightening thing about him was his eyes, which had the shifty brilliant glare of a wild animal. He himself was the colour of old mahogany, and his hair and heavy eyebrows were black, while his eyes were the palest yellow-green—the colour of downland grass in the heat of high summer. He had a nice van and a sullen-looking wife, who certainly had no Gypsy blood in her. Now, I had no con-

tretemps with this man. He was, indeed, most polite and he had a pleasant low-pitched musical voice. But I was uneasy all the time I was with him—which was not long—and I have never been more thankful to leave anyone.

It must be remembered that if we look askance at the Gypsies and those that travel the roads, they regard us with equal distrust—and, taking it by and large, not without reason. It can take a long time to break down the wall of reserve and indifference built up against the gorgio, and things may sometimes become a little strained in the process. I have had my moments. One, only last year, was with a woman—not in the least frightening, but it might have been awkward. I do not look in the least like a Gypsy. I never could look like a Gypsy and I do not try to look like one. It has on occasions proved a handicap. Many of those who follow the Romani trail do look like Gypsies, and some can pass themselves off as Gypsies without very much trouble. Dr. Irving Brown, the greatest American *Rai*, can do so. George Borrow could do so, rather better perhaps than he made out. (But then I have always wondered how much Gypsy blood ran in Borrow's veins. He was so astonishingly unlike his father and his brother in every way, in looks, in build, in temperament.) But I cannot. I am an obvious gorgio. I am fair-skinned and blue-eyed, and large and rather solidly built. And so when I approached this van and asked, as I thought, a harmless question of the woman in charge (it *was* a harmless question !) I was greeted with a pail of cold and very dirty water over the hall door, and a torrent of abuse in the argot of the roads. My verbal reactions to this treatment quickly convinced her and her husband, who had come running up, that I could not possibly be what I appeared to be. And whenever I meet them now the occasion of my first visit is brought up amid shrieks of laughter. But I have never discovered the reason for that initial greeting.

No, there is nothing frightening about the Gypsies once you know them, or rather, since no gorgio ever really

knows them, once you are accepted by them. They are no better and no worse than other men anywhere. But there is danger in knowing them. Do you remember Mathew Arnold's Scholar Gypsy? He did not come back. And there are many more who have joined the travelling folk and have not come back. There is an overwhelming fascination about them and their mode of life. It is the fascination of freedom. We think that we are free; indeed we boast that we are. But of our civilisation we have made a tyrant. We are the slaves of money, of convention, of time-tables, of forms. We are the cogs in the gigantic machine of bureaucracy. The Gypsy, despite the unremitting attentions of the police, is still free. You know real freedom, real liberty, the moment you put foot on the road with the men and women who live on the road, the moment you sit, legs a-dangle, on the foot-board of a waggon, a good horse in front of you and fortune-knows-what around the corner. There is no romance, in the story-book sense, about the life of a Gypsy. It is a hard life and a rough life. It is not a life for those of weak stomach. But men have always to pay a high price for liberty. And it has rewards for the Gypsy beyond all price: true comradeship—a comradeship against all the world—and the clean air, sweet smells, and the earth and the sky, sun, wind, rain as God made them: there is truth.

For that truth the Gypsy has fought and lied and cheated throughout the centuries. In every country in which he has settled he has maintained in the face of all regulations and all oppression his own individuality, his own language, his own way of life. And he remains to-day what he has always been, a man apart, a member of the most mysterious race on earth.

# I

## EARLY HISTORY AND LEGEND

*"Where we comes from the dear Lord only knows and He's too high and mighty to tell the likes of us."*—CHARLEY SMITH, a Gypsy.

No race, except perhaps the Jews, is so widely distributed over the surface of the earth as the Gypsies. No matter where you travel in Europe, there you will find Gypsies. They are widely spread in America, both north and south. They are to be found throughout Asia Minor and Asia, except possibly in Southern India and the islands that stretch eastwards from the Malayan peninsular. They are settled in North Africa, along the Mediterranean coast and in Egypt, Darfur and Kardofan, and wandering bands visit South and East Africa from time to time. There are isolated bands in Australia and New Zealand. It would be idle to pretend that everywhere the race is the same—there is, for example, a clear distinction to be drawn between Oriental and Occidental Gypsies, though even the Gypsy long settled in the West is obviously an Oriental—but everywhere the race has resisted the onslaughts of the civilisations among which they dwell, and everywhere, even to-day, they exhibit the same, the old, characteristics. They are a migratory and nomadic people. Their wide distribution is due to migrations in the past. They are, and they always have been, wanderers. Even to-day, though in many parts of the world they are through force of circumstances sedentary, you have only to cast the most casual glance at the household arrangements of an apparently settled Gypsy to see that the nomad in him is very far from dead. No race, not even the Jews, has so successfully maintained its characteristics in the face of a hostile world. And no race has so strongly developed the power of handing on their characteristics. The half-bred



Gypsy is invariably more Gypsy than gorgio in temperament. Even a small drop of Romani blood in the veins is sufficient to colour a whole life. A famous Lord Chancellor—F. E. Smith, Earl of Birkenhead (though he had more than a small drop)—is an excellent example. He rose to great eminence in our legal and political life, but he was always more Romani than gorgio in temperament. And for one of his children at least a little Romani blood has coloured all of life. Birkenhead was proud of his Gypsy blood. He was no exception. I have met many men and women only too eager to deny or conceal the possession of Jewish blood ; I have yet to meet a man or woman who is not proud of the possession of Gypsy blood. Yet, despite the extraordinary success of the race in maintaining its characteristics in the face of an almost uniformly hostile world, despite its astonishing vigour in handing those characteristics on, despite many and varied talents, despite pride of blood, and fierceness of independence, despite an obviously great antiquity, the world at large knows very little about the Gypsies, and they know practically nothing about themselves. We know the history of the Jews from very early times. We have a fairly complete history of the Gypsies (so far as the West is concerned : we have none for the East) only from the fifteenth century. Before that date history is swallowed up in conjecture. Who are the Gypsies ? Whence did they come ? Of their origin we know nothing. They remain what they have always been, the most intriguing people on earth. They remain so despite the fact that many great scholars have interested themselves deeply in the problem.

There have, naturally, been any number of solutions. They are, we have been told, Egyptians or at any rate people who came into Europe by way of Egypt. They are the Sudras, expelled by Tamerlane. They are Jats, Doms, Dards, Changars. They are the heretic sect of the Athin-gani. They are the Sigynnæ of Herodotus. They are the Sintians of Homer, a metal-working race speaking a wild tongue. (It has even been suggested that Homer himself

was a Gypsy.) They are a prehistoric race that have lived in Europe for more than three thousand years. And so on. No doubt I have omitted several equally attractive solutions, but those will suffice to give some idea of the variety of theories that have been put forward from time to time in perfect good faith.

For many years now it has been recognised that the solution to the problem lies in their language. It was in 1763 that a Hungarian theological student named Stefan Vályi made the acquaintance in Leyden of three students from Malabar. It was in conversation with them that he discovered the fact that their language had much in common with that of the Gypsies from his part of Hungary. He drew up a vocabulary of one thousand words and put it before some Gypsies at Raab and found that they were able to translate the major part of it. It was an extremely important discovery. It showed that theirs was an Indian language of Aryan origin connected with the original Sanskrit. It shattered the theory, until then widely held (and not altogether dead to-day), that the Gypsies were, in fact, Egyptians. (But it did not, of course, remove the possibility that they may have come into Europe by way of Egypt.) Later Rüdiger and Grellmann and Bryant made the discovery more widely known, but it was not until Pott published in 1844-5 his magnificent two-volume work, *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien*, that the investigation of the Indian origin of the Gypsies began to be undertaken scientifically. (It is, by the way, worthy of note that Pott, whose work is still indispensable to serious students of the Romanies, never came into contact with the people themselves.) Pott was followed by Müller, Alexander Paspati, Miklosich, Weislocki, von Sowa, Kopernicki and many others. The earliest British worker in this field was John Beames, an Indian Civil Servant, who was an accomplished Sanskrit scholar and the author of *A Comparative Grammar of the Modern Aryan Languages of India*, the three volumes of which were published in 1872, 1875 and 1879. Beames regarded the Gypsy tongue as one of the Modern

Aryan languages of India, though he did not recognise it as such until after the completion of his first volume. He had no very profound knowledge of the language himself and took many of his examples from Miklosich and Paspatis (he seems to have been unaware of the existence of Pott's great work), but he was undoubtedly a great authority on other points of importance. All these men were first and foremost philologists. They all agree in assigning the birthplace of the Gypsy language to India. But that is a very different matter from establishing the exact locality. Miklosich proved that some kinship with the Dardu and Kafir dialects existed. M. de Goeje, a Dutch scholar, believed that the Jats, Zott and Dom were related to them. Beames considered the language more nearly related to Sindhi. The localities suggested range from the Hindu Kush mountain area to the deserts of the Indus. More recent workers in this philological field include Pischel, Woolner, Macfie, Finck, Kuhn, Littmann, Sampson (who, if primarily interested in philology, was a Rai of outstanding attainment and no cloistered scholar), Macalister, Ackerley and Gilliat-Smith. They have done much brilliant and suggestive work, but it is no good pretending that the problem has been solved. Nor do I think it is in the least likely to be. I am not a philologist and I lay no claim to knowledge of philology, but it does seem to me that any attempt to establish the original home of the Gypsies by reference to their language is bound to fail, for the very simple reason that we have no knowledge of the dialects of India at the time the Gypsies left. And the Gypsies have been away from India far too long in any case. That much of their language is of Indian origin cannot be disputed, but it cannot be referred to any one dialect—indeed it cannot be identified with any existing dialect—and it has all the appearance of having been collected from several, which seems to suggest that they were already a nomad people at the time of their stay in India.

When did the Gypsies leave India? Beames and Miklosich agree in dating the evolution of the Modern

Aryan languages of India from somewhere about 1,000 A.D. Most of the later philologists agree with them. This is taken to mean that the Gypsies could not have left India before that date and almost certainly left a good deal later, and that is, in fact, the opinion of the majority of those who have made a deep study of the language. But, as the late Dr. Sampson pointed out, while very great weight must be attached to such opinions, "it cannot be overlooked that the huge gap between the break-up of the Prakrits and our first knowledge of the modern vernaculars makes any positive statement rather in the nature of dogmatism." And, as a matter of fact, Miklosich himself does not altogether reject the possibility that at an earlier date when the Modern Indian dialects were taking definite shape, about the Middle-Indian period, the Gypsies may have left their home, taking with them in their language the germ of corruption, and far from their fellow-countrymen have developed an analytic form of language similar to that of the other Indian idioms.

Leaving out of account such theories as those that would identify the Gypsies with the Athingani (who, by the way, were a sect, not a race) and the Sintians of Homer, there is a good deal to suggest that the Gypsies were outside India long before 1,000 A.D. The Persian poet Firdusi tells us in his *Shâh Nâme* that the monarch Bahrâm imported into Persia, about the year 420, ten thousand musicians of both sexes from India. The same story is referred to by the Arabian historian Hamza of Ispahan, who wrote half a century earlier than Firdusi. Both writers agree in calling these musicians Gypsies. Firdusi uses the ordinary Persian Luri, and Hamza the word Zott, which is merely the regular Arabic pronunciation of Jat, and is one of the modern Syrian words for the Gypsies. Nor does the story end there. Chroniclers tell us that in the seventh century, during a war between the Arabs and the Persians, the Zott deserted from the Persian forces and settled in Arabia. Early in the ninth century these Zott had become so great a nuisance in the valley of the lower Tigris that twenty-

seven thousand of them were transported to Ainzarba and other places on the northern frontier of Syria. And lastly we hear from Tabari, that after the Byzantine conquest of Ainzarba in 855 A.D., the Zott inhabitants, with their women, children and cattle, were carried as prisoners into the Greek empire. The story hangs together too well and is too well authenticated to be lightly dismissed. Against it you have the evidence of the philologists that Romani in its present form could not have evolved until very much later than the fifth century. You can take your choice. But that the Gypsies did spend much time in Persia and Greece before spreading over Europe is beyond question and is stressed by Miklosich himself. The evidence is in their language. Greek words are to be found in all the European Gypsy dialects, including English. Possibly there are as many as two hundred Greek loan words in use among Gypsies to-day, a fact which lends, I think, valuable support to the story of the Zott and their wanderings.

<sup>1</sup> The widely accepted date for the appearance of the Gypsies in Europe is 1417. The date has led to a good deal of confusion in the past, for it was taken by many scholars as the date for the arrival of the Gypsies in Europe, and so coloured all the research into origin, language and so forth. It was an inexcusable misconception; for the Gypsies at Lüneburg carried letters of recommendation from the King of Hungary, and so they must obviously have travelled through that country. And again their leaders, their "dukes," bore good Christian names, such as Andrew and Michael and Thomas, which argues a long stay in and familiarity with Christian lands. We know now that Gypsies were settled in south-eastern Europe for many years before their first appearance in Germany—if you believe the Zott story from at least 855 A.D.

Gypsies were certainly in Corfu early in the fourteenth century. The Empress Catherine de Courtenay-Valois (1301-46) granted to the suzerains of Corfu authority to receive as vassals certain *homines vaginiti*, coming from the Greek mainland and using the Greek rite. By the end of

the fourteenth century all these *homines vaginiti* were subject to one baron, Gianuli de Abitabulo, and formed the nucleus of a fief called the *feudum Acinganorum*, which lasted under one superior or another until the abolition of feudal tenures at the beginning of the twentieth century. The presence of Gypsies in Corfu, incidentally, must mean that the Italians early came into contact with them, for the island belonged to Venice from 1401 to 1797, and the Venetians were a sea-going people long before that. Indeed we have information about Gypsies in the Peloponnesus from a Venetian Viceroy, Othaviano Buono, before the end of the fourteenth century, for some time about 1395 that gentleman confirmed the privileges granted to the Acingani of Nauplion by his predecessors. It seems fairly certain, in fact, that the Peloponnesus had known Gypsies for a long while. Hopf drew attention to the number of ruins in the peninsular bearing the name *Gyphtokastron*, "Gypsy fortress," and, if that does not seem an altogether convincing reason for supposing a Gypsy population, the fact that the fourteenth century Byzantine writer, Mayaris, speaks of the Egyptians (Acingani) as one of the seven races living in the area is convincing enough.

At about the same time we have proof of the presence of Gypsies in Roumania, and, if not proof, a very strong suggestion that they had been in the country for a long time. In 1387 Mircen I, Prince of Wallachia, by a charter that was preserved in the State Archives at Bucharest at any rate until the beginning of the first German War, renewed a grant that had been made by his uncle Vladislav to the monastery of St. Anthony at Voditza of forty *Salaschi*—that is, "tents" or families—of Atsegane. This is proof that the Roumanian Gypsies were serfs in 1370—they remained so until 1856—and people do not become serfs all at once. They must have been in the country long before that date.

Bataillard sought to prove that the foreigners called *Bemische*, who were established some time before 1400 in

the bishopric of Würzburg, were Gypsies. I do not think that there is much doubt that the *Bemische* who were at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1495 were Gypsies, but Bataillard is not altogether successful in proving his theory for the earlier record. Bataillard was of the opinion that the Gypsies were in Europe in prehistoric times and that it was to them that prehistoric Europe owed all its knowledge of metal work, and he was a little inclined to stretch a point or two in favour of his theories. But there can be no doubt at all about Mr. Winstedt's records of the presence of Gypsies in central Europe in the fifteenth century prior to 1417. He has established the fact that there were Gypsy settlements at Hildesheim in 1407, at Basle in 1414, and at Meissen in 1416, which brings us to 1417, the popular date for the commencement of Gypsy history. In that year they were seen in Moldavia, Hungary, Germany and Switzerland, and from that year there are records galore.

It is rather astonishing that in view of all these early records it should still be the accepted view that the Gypsies, even though they were settling in south-eastern Europe in the fourteenth century or earlier, did not arrive in central and northern Europe until the fifteenth. The records I have mentioned are all well known to gypsologists, and it is generally accepted that they refer to wandering tinkers, who indulged (as do Gypsies) in horse-dealing and fortune-telling. What is not generally accepted is that they were Gypsies. The main reason for this is the Romani language with its obvious affinity to Indian languages and the positive assertion of some philologists that it cannot have evolved much before 1000 A.D. Not being a philologist I do not know how much store should be set by the evidence of language. Paspatis believed that the true history of the Gypsies was to be found in their language, and Paspatis was a very great scholar. But even if you accept this, is it certain that the dates of the philologists are correct? The philologists are at work on something, an indefinite something at that, which happened at least eight hundred years before the earliest of them set to work.

Can they be definite to a century or two or three? The Arabian historian Hamza of Ispahan wrote about 950 A.D. and Firdusi about fifty years later. They record something that happened (and personally I have no doubt it did happen) four hundred years earlier. Is it certain that their dates are correct? Time is an elastic quantity—the early Hebrew historians provide sufficient proof of that—and it is at least possible that they predated the event by a century or two. The two schools of thought are not utterly incompatible.

The Gypsy word for men of their own race is *Rom*. That is the European Gypsy: the Armenian Gypsy is *Lom* and the Syrian and Persian Gypsy is *Dom*. All of these are, as Sampson has shown, in exact phonetic correspondence with the Sanskrit *doma* and the modern Indian *dom*, which means “a man of low caste who gains his living by singing and dancing.” The Doms of modern India are vagrant tribes to be found mainly in Behar and the west and north-west Provinces, and they have many features in common with the Gypsies. They wander about with ragged little reed tents, which they pitch in the neighbourhood of villages, and they are adept at disappearing once they have got all they can out of the inhabitants. Some of them make baskets, mats and similar articles; and in Dardistan, where they form a considerable part of the population but still, as elsewhere, constitute the lower caste, they are musicians, smiths and leather-workers. They eat the flesh of animals that have died a natural death, and are especially fond of carrion pork—the *mulo balo* of the English Gypsy. They do not appear to have any mother-tongue, but speak the language of the people among whom they live. Some writers object that the Indian Doms appear to be of Dravidian, not of Aryan stock. Dr. Sampson met this objection by pointing out that we know little or nothing of the early Doms or of those vagrant minstrels who left their fatherland more than a thousand years ago. There are to-day Doma and Doms, and the name may well have no more racial significance than our own “smith”



or "tinker." H. L. Williams, a great authority on the wandering and criminal tribes of India, says : "I have also sought for pure unalloyed Doms, and I have never found them. I believe that *Dom* merely means a professional musician, and that the term is occupational, applied to any and every outcaste tribe." From this it would appear that *Dom* or *Rom* is the old name of the original caste and calling of the Gypsies, both Asiatic and European. But it does not, of course, connect the Romani with any particular dialect of India nor does it supply any clue to the migration route followed by the Gypsies.

John Sampson, at the end of his life, seems to have come to the conclusion that the Gypsies were in Persia before 900 A.D. He held to the belief that in Persia they divided into two bands, the one whom he called *Ben* Gypsies travelling southwards into Syria, and becoming the ancestors of the present Gypsies of Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Persia and Transcaucasia ; the other, the *Phen* Gypsies, settling in Armenia and then migrating westwards through Byzantine Greece. Personally I am sure that Sampson was right in assuming a division in Persia and two different routes of migration. I think he was right in believing that the Gypsies were in Persia before 900 A.D. (history, even if it is largely legendary, supports this), but I am not sure that he is right in assuming that the migration into Europe by way of Byzantine Greece was the first of such movements by the Gypsies.

It may be said that the people who came in 1417 would not have created the stir they did create had they not been new and different. But Mr. Winstedt has shown that they were, in fact, in Germany at least ten years before the stir, and that the bands who created the stir must have come from Hungary. The fact that the accounts of 1417 onwards are the first full accounts we have does not mean that they refer to the first appearance of the Gypsies in that neighbourhood. In 1866 a large band of English Gypsies visited Edinburgh : the Scottish newspapers of that date wrote as though it was the first visit of Gypsies to Scotland.

We know that it was not. A similar error may well have been made by the European chroniclers of 1417-34—and it must be remembered that in those days few people could write.

History or legend, the evidence of language ; you may take your choice. I do not believe that Bataillard was correct in asserting that the Gypsies were in Europe in pre-historic times. I do not believe that the philologists are correct in their dates—I have noticed that philologists sometimes fail to see the wood for the trees—but I do not deny the Indian origin of the Gypsies. I have no theory of my own.

## II

### RECENT HISTORY

WITH the fifteenth century we enter a new era in Gypsy history. From 1417 onwards we have many accounts of their visitations and can follow quite closely their journeyings across Europe. That there was a population of Gypsies in central and western Europe long before 1417 is, I think, beyond question. The year 1417 saw the beginnings of a fresh invasion of Gypsies, who had for long been settled in south-eastern Europe and who were moving because their provinces had either been invaded or were directly threatened by the Turks. But the invasion proper did not begin until about 1438. So much has been made of the invasion of 1417 that it is now difficult to realise that it was, in fact, undertaken by a single band of Gypsies, numbering no more than 300 in all, a reconnaissance party charged with the duty of spying out the land. They were a highly disciplined lot under able leaders. They split up as occasion demanded and met again at prearranged places. They travelled at astonishing speed and they went out of their way to force themselves upon the notice of the towns they visited. Now this is a most ungypsylike procedure, and it is to this extraordinary departure from the instincts of their race that we owe our comparatively full knowledge of their movements. Indeed it is very probable that had they behaved in the normal Gypsy fashion we should have heard nothing about them at all: it was because they were extraordinary that they were reported. Most of our information about them comes from chronicles and municipal accounts. Time and again we read in municipal accounts of a gift made to some duke or earl or count of Little Egypt and his followers and invariably we find that they presented themselves as penitents and pilgrims banished from their homes, and time and

again we read that they carried in support of their statement letters of recommendation from the Emperor Sigismund and, later on, from the Pope as well. They wanted to be seen—they were indeed exceptionally ostentatious—and they wanted to be received in the towns. They were spying out the land, and they wanted to know how wealthy the land was and what chance of a living their people would have if they came. The obvious places in which to get that information were the towns, and to the towns they went. It is evident that on their return they reported very favourably, for from about 1438 onwards we find Gypsies spreading rapidly through every country in Europe. Also, if they received a favourable impression of the lands they had been sent to explore and of the credulity of the people who inhabited them, there can be no doubt that the inhabitants were equally, though less favourably, impressed with them.

The first record of this exploring band is from Lüneburg. Thence they proceeded to Hamburg, Lübeck, Weimar, Rostock, Stralsund and Griefswald. We have accounts of them from two chroniclers of Lübeck, who agree that they numbered about 300, besides women and children, that they came from "Eastern parts" or "from Tartary" (one chronicler calls them Tartars) and that they called themselves "Secani" or "Tsigans." At their head rode a duke and a count, richly dressed, wearing belts of silver and leading hunting dogs in the manner of European nobles. Behind these nobles came a motley ill-dressed crowd of men on foot, and the women and children came in the rear, riding in waggons. They bore letters of safe-conduct from various princes and one from the Emperor Sigismund, and they said that they were on a seven years' pilgrimage imposed by their own bishops as a penance for infidelity to the Christian faith. These letters caused them to be well received in the towns they visited. But the Germans of these merchant towns were not long deceived. We hear that the Gypsies camped in the fields near the towns at night, that they were great thieves, especially the women,

and that because of this "several were taken and slain." These chroniclers agree in saying that they obeyed without question the commands of their leaders, and that they frequently broke up into smaller bands, but that they followed each other very closely and marched more or less as a whole.

Evidently they did not find the Baltic towns altogether to their liking, for early in 1418 we find them at Leipzig and at Frankfurt-am-Main, and later in the year at Zürich, Basle, Berne and Soleure in Switzerland. The Swiss chronicler, Justinger, writes of them as "more than two hundred baptised pagans : they were from Egypt, pitiful, black, miserable, with women and children ; and they camped before the town in the fields, until there came a prohibition because they had become unbearable to the inhabitants on account of their thefts, for they stole all they could. They had among them dukes and earls, who were provided with good silver belts, and who rode on horseback ; the others were poor and pitiful. They wandered from one country to another ; and they had a safe-conduct from the King of the Romans." And so it goes on : at Augsburg and at Maçon, where they practised psalmistry and necromancy, in 1419 : at Sisturon in Provence in the same year they received large rations from the townspeople who were frightened of them and called them "Saracens." In 1420 we hear of them in the Low Countries at Deventre, the town records saying : "Out of charity, to the Lord Andrew, Duke of Little Egypt : on a Wednesday after *reminiscesse* (6th March) to the said lord, who had been driven out of his country on account of the Christian faith, and had come to our town with a hundred persons, men, women and children, and about forty horses ; the same having letters from the King of the Romans, containing an invitation to give them alms, and to treat them with kindness in all the countries where they might go : given by order of our aldermen, 25 florins, and for bread, beer, straw, herrings and smoked herrings, for cost of the carriage of the beer, for straw, for cleaning out the barn in

which they slept . . . in all 19 florins, 10 plates." In the same year they were in Friesland and the north of Holland, and in 1421 at Tournai where "Sir Miquiel, Prince of Latingham in Egypt" received "out of pity and compassion" twelve gold pieces and bread and a barrel of beer.

In 1422 we hear of them in Bologna, and their leader, it seems probable, is the same man who did so nicely at Deventre. The Chronicle recounts how on "the 18th July 1422 a duke of Egypt, Duke Andrew, arrived at Bologna, with women, children and men from his own country. There might be a hundred. This duke having denied the Christian faith, the King of Hungary had taken possession of his lands and person. Then he told the King that he wished to return to Christianity, and he had been baptised with about four thousand men; those who refused to be baptised were put to death. After the King of Hungary had thus taken them and re-baptised them, he commanded them to travel about the world for seven years, to go to Rome to see the Pope, and afterwards to return into their own country. When they arrived at Bologna they had been journeying for five years, and more than half of them were dead. They had a decree from the King of Hungary, the Emperor, in virtue of which they were allowed to thieve during these seven years, wherever they might go, without being amenable to justice.

"When they arrived at Bologna, they lodged themselves inside and outside the gate of Galiera, and settled themselves under the porticoes, except the duke, who lodged at the King's Inn. They remained a fortnight at Bologna. During this time many people went to see them, on account of the duke's wife, who, it was said, could foretell what would happen to a person during his life, as well as what was interesting in the present, how many children would be born, whether a woman was good or bad, and other things; concerning all of which she told truly. And of those who wished to have their fortunes told, few went to consult without having their purse stolen, and the women

had pieces of their dress cut off. The women of the band wandered about the town, seven or eight together ; they entered the houses of the inhabitants, and whilst they were telling idle tales, some of them laid hold of what was within their reach. In the same way they visited the shops under the pretext of buying something, but in reality to steal. Many thefts were committed in this way in Bologna. So it was cried throughout the town that no one should go to see them under a penalty of fifty pounds and excommunication, for they were the most cunning thieves in all the world. It was even allowed to those who had been robbed by them to rob them in return to the amount of their losses. In consequence of which several of the inhabitants of Bologna slipped during the night into a stable where some of their horses were shut up, and stole the best of them. The others, wishing to get back their horses, agreed to restore a great number of the stolen articles. But seeing that there was nothing more to gain there, they left Bologna and went off towards Rome.

“ Observe that they were the ugliest brood ever seen in this country. They were thin and black, and they ate like swine : their women went in smocks and wore a pilgrim’s cloak across the shoulder, rings in their ears, and a long veil on their head. One of them gave birth to a child in the market place, and at the end of three days, she went on to join her people.”

On the 7th August of the same year they were at Forti, on the road to Rome. The chronicler says that some of them said they came from India, and he also says that for two days they went to and fro like wild beasts and thieves. They left Forti for Rome. The object of this journey is clear enough. Their original story told of a seven years’ wandering, and the seven years were drawing to a close. They needed some further safe-conduct than that given by Sigismund. There seems to be no doubt that they did get an audience of Pope Martin V (though the Vatican archives have not got a record of it) for later in the year they were back again in Switzerland and they had with them papal

as well as imperial safe-conducts. And there seems to be some evidence that they were here joined by a few Gypsies newly arrived from Hungary with a fresh safe-conduct from Sigismund.

For almost five years after this we lose sight of them. But in the August of 1427 they appeared outside Paris, then held by the English, and we have a very full chronicle of the event :

“ On the Sunday after the middle of August, which was the 17th day of August of the said year 1427, came to Paris twelve penitents as they called themselves, that is to say, a duke, an earl, and ten men all on horseback, who said they were good Christians, and were from lower Egypt ; and said, moreover, that they had been Christians formerly, and that it was not long since the Christians had conquered them and all their country, and made them all become Christians, or put to death those who would not ; those who were baptised were lords of the country as before, and promised to be good and loyal, and to keep the faith of Jesus Christ unto death. And they had a king and queen in their country, who remained in their domains because they were Christianised.

“ *Item*, True, as they said, a certain time after they had taken the Christian faith, the Saracens came and attacked them, and then, as they were but little firm in our faith with very little hope, without scarcely enduring the war, and without doing their duty towards their country, defending it very little, they surrendered to their enemies and became Saracens as before, and denied our Lord.

“ *Item*, It happened afterwards that the Christians, such as the Emperor of Germany, the King of Poland, and other lords, when they knew that they had thus falsely and without great difficulty abandoned our faith, and that they had so soon become Saracens and idolaters, threw themselves upon them and soon vanquished them, as though they thought that they would be left in their country as before to become Christians. But the Emperor and the other lords, by a great deliberation in council, said that



they should never hold land in their country unless the Pope consented, and that they should go to the Holy Father at Rome ; and there they went all, old and young, with great pain to the children. When they were there they made a general confession of their sins. When the Pope had heard their confession, he gave them as penance, after a great deliberation in council, to go for seven years following about the world, without sleeping in a bed ; and that they might have some comfort for their expense, ordered, as was said, that every bishop and mitred abbot should give them one payment of ten livres tournois ; and he gave them letters making mention of this to the prelates of the Church, and gave them his benediction ; so they departed. And they had been five years about the world before they came to Paris.

“ And they came the 17th day of August in the year 1427, the above-named twelve ; and on the day of St. John the Beheaded the commoner people came, who were not allowed to enter Paris, but were lodged by authority at La Chappelle-Saint-Denis ; and they were not more in all, men, women and children, than about a hundred or a hundred and twenty, and when they left their country they were a thousand or twelve hundred, but the remainder had died on the way, and their king and queen ; and those who were alive had hope of still having worldly goods, for the Holy Father had promised them that he would give them a good and fertile land to inherit, but that they must finish their penance with a good heart.

“ *Item*, Whilst they were at La Chappelle more people were never seen to go to the benediction of the Landit than came from Paris, from Saint Denis, and from the neighbourhood of Paris, to see them. And it is true that the children, boys and girls, were as clever as could be. And most and nearly all had both ears pierced, and in each ear a silver ring, or two in each, and they said it was a sign of nobility in their country.

“ *Item*, The men were very black, their hair was fuzzled ; the women the ugliest that could be seen, and the blackest ;

all had their faces covered with wounds (tattoo marks?), hair as black as a horse's tail, as only dress an old blanket, very coarse and fastened on the shoulder by a band of cloth or cord, and underneath a poor shift for all covering. In short, they were the poorest creatures ever seen in France in the memory of man. And, notwithstanding their poverty, there were witches in their company who looked into people's hands and told what had happened to them, or would happen, and sowed discord in several marriages, for they said to the husband 'your wife has played you false,' or to the wife, 'your husband has played you false.' And, what was worse, whilst they were speaking to folks by magic or otherwise, or by the enemy in hell, or by dexterity and skill, it was said they emptied people's purses and put into theirs. But in truth; I went there three or four times to speak to them, but I never perceived that I lost a penny, nor did I ever see them look into a hand, but the people said so everywhere, so that the news came to the Bishop of Paris who went there, and took with him a Friar of the Minors named Little Jacobin, who by command of the Bishop made a fine preaching, excommunicating all those who had believed them and shown their hands. And they were obliged to depart; and they departed on the day of Our Lady of September, and went away towards Pointoise."

Three weeks later, at Amiens, Thomas, Earl of Little Egypt, with forty followers, received pious alms from the mayor and aldermen after showing them the papal letters. Curiously, the mayor and aldermen of Amiens do not appear to have heard of these wandering penitents before they came and seem to have been taken completely by surprise and thrown into a considerable flurry. And so the story goes on. There is not need to follow it in detail, for each account has much the same story to tell. In the next seven years we have records of wandering bands of Egyptians at many places including Tournai, Utrecht, Arnheim, Bommel, Middleburg, Metz, Leyden, Frankfurt and so on. I think there can be little doubt that during

the five years' gap between the visit to Rome and the visit to Paris some members of the band had returned to spread the good news, for though the main invasion did not commence until about 1438 there do seem to have been many more wandering bands after 1427. In 1438, however, thousands began to pour into Europe, overrunning Germany, Italy and France. They were in Spain by 1447, in Poland and Russia by 1501, in Sweden by 1512. And within a few years of their arrival steps were being taken in every country for their suppression and removal.

We do not know when the Gypsies first came to Britain. The first mention of them by that name is in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer for Scotland under the date 22nd April, 1505. But that reference obviously refers to the Gypsies of this new invasion (the word Egyptian is exclusively their own and was unknown before the entry of the pioneering bands into Germany in 1417) and does no more than indicate that they were in this country before that date. We do not know how long before nor do we know for certain if we had Gypsies in these islands before the great invasion swept across Europe. Be that as it may—and we shall not now I fancy get any nearer the true date—there is some corroborative evidence for a date before the middle of the fifteenth century. And again it comes from Scotland. Simson says that “in the reign of James II away putting of sorners, fancied fools, vagabonds, out-liers, masterful beggars, cairds, and such like runners about, is more than once enforced by Acts of Parliament”: and we have for example an Act of the Scottish Parliament of the year 1449 which is directed against “sorners, over-liers, and masterful beggars, with horse, hounds, or other goods.” Sorners were people who forcibly quartered themselves upon others. Now there is no mention of the word Gypsy in this act, but it aims at a class corresponding in every particular, even down to the “dogs of the chase,” with the earlier pioneering Gypsies of the Continent. And, furthermore, when we do finally come to the word

“Egyptians” in Scottish Acts of Parliament we find it used to describe people with just those very habits so clearly outlined in the Act of 1449. I do not think, despite the lack of the word Egyptians, that there can be any reasonable doubt that the newcomers among Gypsies were in Scotland before 1449.

And it is to Scotland we must turn, for the first reference to the Gypsies, as such, in Great Britain which occurs in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer for Scotland in 1505. It is very short : “1505, Apr. 22. Item to the Egyptians be the Kinge’s command vii lib.” No more : we do not know what this payment of £7 was for, but it seems to be generally accepted that it was for some sort of entertainment. I think it is at least as likely that it was a charitable payment to pilgrims on the same lines as those made by so many people on the Continent nearly a hundred years later. The penance and pilgrimage tale was apparently never used in England (probably because the English had had plenty of experience of it in France) but it was certainly worked in Scotland, for in July, 1505, we find the King, James IV, writing to his uncle, the King of Denmark, commending to him, “Anthony Gagino, a lord of Little Egypt,” who with his retinue had reached Scotland a few months earlier “during a pilgrimage through the Christian world, undertaken at the command of the Apostolic See.” One of the most intriguing, and inexplicable, things about this period of Gypsy history is the marked change in the Royal attitude towards them. James II had shown no love for the sorners and masterly beggars of his time : James IV went out of his way to aid the Egyptians financially and to commend them to the ruler of the next country they were to visit. James V had them to dance before him at Holyrood House in 1530 and paid them for doing so. And this, moreover, at a time when they were rapidly losing their glamour and acquiring their merited reputation. In the Council Register for the City of Aberdeen under date May 8th, 1527, we read (I have modernised the English) :

“The said day, it was sufficiently proved before the baillies and a part of Council, present for the time, by famous divers witnesses, that the Egyptians took out of Thomas Watson’s house two silver spoons, lying in the locker of a cabinet, which contained each one an ounce of silver, wherefore they charged Aiken Jacks, master of the said Egyptians, to deliver the said spoons again, or their equivalent, within twenty-four hours, because he answered and became good for his company in judgement: and as to the money the said Thomas alleged was taken away by them, the baillies adjourned the question because they got no witness to prove more clearly. And moreover, John Watson, and his mother and servant, were made quit of all annoyance from the said Egyptians, and that was given for doom.”

Aiken Jacks is obviously an assumed name. It was a common name in Aberdeen at this time, and is good Scots. I think this is the first occasion on which we come across the Gypsy practice of adopting the names of the people among whom they stayed, or rather the first occasion of its use by the Egyptians. In this Aberdeen record we see the Gypsies in their traditional rôle of thieves. We find them in the same Council Register, and again for theft, on 22nd January, 1530. The names, this time, make very interesting reading, for the accused were Barbara Dya Baptista and Helen Andree, and they were described as the servants of George Faw, Earl of Egypt. Andree is probably the Scots Andrew, but Baptista is no Scots name at all and Dya is, of course, merely the Romani word *dya*, O mother. And this is also the earliest definite mention of the famous Scots Gypsy name Faw or Faa in connection with Gypsies, though a John Faw and a Patrick Faw are mentioned in the Register of the Great Seal of Scotland as holding land in Lothian in 1507. The chieftainship of this band seems to have been shared by two brothers George and John Faw, and they made themselves notorious in the Aberdeen neighbourhood, for we find them mentioned several times

in the Council Register for various offences, including drawing the blood of one Sandie Barron. They were tried fairly on every occasion and indeed judged with leniency, but they were evidently too much for their hosts in the end, for on 21st February, 1540, this edict was recorded by the City Council :

“ The baillies charged George Faw, Egyptian, and his brother, to remove themselves their company and goods out of this town, betwixt this date and Sunday next, under all penalty and charge that thereafter may follow : and in the meantime, that none of their company come into any house or close in this town, unless they be sent about, and if any does what may be away in the same house, that the said George and his brother shall refund the same.”

The edict was never obeyed. Six days previously James V had signed a writ of the Privy Council of Scotland which granted to the Gypsies astonishing privileges, and I suppose knowledge of this document reached Aberdeen before the Council's edict was enforced. This writ was in effect a treaty between the King of Scotland and “ John Faw, Lord and Earl of little Egypt ” :

“ James, by the Grace of God, King of Scots : To our Sherrife of Edinburgh, principal and within the constabulary of Haddington, Berwick, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Perth, Forfar, Fife, etc. etc., provosts, aldermen and baillies of our burghs and cities of Edinburgh, etc. etc., greeting : For as much as it is humbly meant and shown to us, by our loved John Faw, Lord and Earl of Little Egypt, that whereas he obtained our letter under our great Seal, direct you all and sundry our said sherrifs, stewards, baillies, provosts, aldermen, and baillies of burghs, and to all and sundry others having authority within our realm, to assist him in execution of justice upon his company and folk, conform to the laws of Egypt, and in punishing of all them that rebel against

him : nevertheless, as we are informed, Sebastiane Lalow Egyptian, one of the said John's company, with his accomplices and partakers under written, that is to say, Anteane Donea, Satona Fingo, Nona Finco, Phillip Hatseyggow, Towla Bailzon, Grasta Neyn, Geleyr Bailzow, Bernard Beige, Demer Matskalla, Nottfaw Lawlowr, Martyn Femine, rebels and conspirators against the said John Faw, and have removed them all utterly out of his company, and taken from him divers sums of money, jewels, clothes and other goods, to the quantity of a great sum of money ; and on nowise will pass home with him, howbeit he has bidden and remained of long time upon them, and is bound and obliged to bring home with him all them of his company that are alive, and a testimony of them that are dead : and as the said John has the said Sebastiane's obligation, made in Dunfermline before our master's household, that he and his company should remain with him, and on nowise depart from him, as the same bears : In contrary to the tenor of which, the said Sebastiane, by sinister and wrong information of false relation, circumvention of us, has purchased our writings, discharging him and the remnant of the persons above written, his accomplices and partakers of the said John's company, and with his goods taken by them from him ; causes certain our lieges assist them and their opinions, and to fortify and take their part against the said John, their lord and master ; so that he on nowise can apprehend nor get them, to have them home again within their own country, after the tenor of his said bond, to his heavy damage and hurt, and in great peril of losing his heritage, and expressly against justice : Our will is, therefore, and we charge you straightly and command that . . . ye and every one of you within the bounds of your offices, command and charge all our lieges, that none of them take upon hand to reset, assist, fortify, supply, maintain, defend or take part with the said Sebastiane and his accomplices above written, for no body's nor other way, against the

said John Faw, their lord and master ; but that they and ye, in likewise, take and lay hands upon them wherever they may be apprehended and bring them to him, to be punished for their demerits, conform to his laws ; and help and fortify him to punish and do justice upon them for their trespasses ; and to that effect lend him your prisons, stocks, fetters, and all other things necessary thereto, as ye and each of you, and all our lieges, will answer to us thereupon, and under all highest pain and charge that may follow : So that the said John have no cause of complaint thereupon in time coming, nor to resort to us again to that effect, notwithstanding any our writings, sinisterly purchased or to be purchased, by the said Sebastiane on the contrary ; And also charge all our lieges that none of them molest, vex, unquiet, or trouble the said John Faw and his company in doing their lawful business, or otherwise, within our realm, and in their passing, remaining, or away-going for the same, under the pain above written : And such-like that ye command and charge all skippers, masters and mariners of all ships within our realm, at all ports and havens where the said John Faw and his company shall happen to resort and come, to receive him and them therein, upon their expenses, for furthering of them forth of our realm to the parts beyond the sea, as you and each of them such-like will answer to us thereupon and under the pain aforesaid. Subscribed with our hands, and under our privy seal at Falkland, the fifteenth day of February, and of our reign the 28th year.”

Such a document can only be called a treaty. Endless reasons for it have been given, the most convincing being, I think, that advanced by Walter Simson, namely, that James V had a fondness for Gypsies, was pretty gullible and got well “led up the garden” by John Faw. What had happened, Simson thought, was that the thieving and general rascality of the Gypsies had reached such a pitch that the Scottish court (at which Faw appears to have been



quite a personage) begged him to bring his pilgrimage to an end, at least so far as Scotland was concerned. But Scotland was a profitable place, and so Faw invented the story of the rebellion and his tale that he could not return to his own country without his full company. He said in effect that, if he were helped to catch them, he would, as soon as they were caught, depart, if ships were provided for him. The rebellion at any rate was a put-up job. Scotland was not a well-policed nor entirely law-abiding country in the reign of James V, and any such rebellion would have been quickly settled by Faw, or made complete by Lawlor, by physical force. The Faas and the Baillies did quarrel later on—the quarrel was said to be for the Gypsy Crown—and this quarrel lasted for many, many years, but it did not arise from this “rebellion” but more likely from some unfortunate marriage between the families. The names given in the treaty are of great interest. Faw and Bailyow are the only ones that have any Scottish connection, Bailyow being merely a variant of Balliol or Baillie. Lawlowr is the old English name Lawlor; and the Christian name Notfaw is obviously due to a painstaking but unintelligent clerk who copied down the correction of a Gypsy who said: “*Not Faw, Lawlowr.*” MacRitchie suggested that Femine might be a spelling of Fleming and that Matskalla might be Macskalla, in which case it would be a Gaelic name. I have never heard Macskalla as a Gaelic name nor can I find it in Gaelic literature, and I think both suggestions a little far-fetched. The other names are obviously foreign. The Gypsies had not yet fully adopted the practice of taking the names of good families for their own.

The treaty (which acknowledged to the Gypsies the right to practise their own laws and customs within the Scottish kingdom) was very short-lived. On June 6th, 1541, an order in council was made respecting John Faw:

“The which day anent the complaint given by John Faw and his brother, and Sebastian Lalow, Egyptians,

to the King's grace, ilk ane plenizeand . . . upon other and divers faults and injuries ; and that is a greed among them to pass home, and have the same decided before the Duke of Egypt. The lords of the council, being advised with the points of the said complaints, and understanding perfectly the great thefts and hurts done by the said Egyptians upon our sovereign lord's lieges, wherever they come or resort, ordain letters to be directed to the provosts and baillies of Edinburgh, St. Johnstown, Dundee, Montrose, Aberdeen, St. Andrews, Elgin, Forres and Inverness ; and to the sheriffs of Edinburgh, Fife, Perth, Forfar, Kincardine, Aberdeen, Elgin and Forres, Banff, Cromarty, Inverness, and all other sheriffs, stewards, provosts and baillies, where it happens the said Egyptians to resort, to command and charge them, by open proclamation, at the market crosses of the head burghs of the sherriffdoms, to depart forth of this realm, with their wives, children and companies, within thirty days after they be charged thereto, under the pain of death : notwithstanding any other letters or privileges granted to them by the king's grace, because his grace, with the advice of the lords, has discharged the same for the causes aforesaid : with certification that if they be found in this realm, the said thirty days being past, they shall be taken and put to death."

This is reversal indeed, and all sorts of reasons have been given for it, including the tale that James V travelling with the Gypsies was hit on the head with a bottle by an irate husband for making advances to one of the women and that he was compelled to carry their goods on his back until he collapsed from fatigue (there is a similar story told of the English King John), the order being the result of his not unnatural indignation. I think Walter Simson is correct in maintaining that whatever may have been the true story the decree was the result of personal irritation, for it lapsed under his successor. It did not in any case succeed in banishing the Gypsies from Scotland, though it

does seem to have driven the Faws south of the border for a while, for we find "Baptist Fawe, Amy Fawe and George Faw, Egyptians," in Durham in 1549. They were back again in 1553, however, and basking once more in the royal favour. Indeed, with the exception of the brief period of the decree of James V (and he died in 1542), the Gypsies lived in Scotland more or less as royal protégés from 1505 to 1579 when James VI took control and repressive legislature was really started.

The earliest mention of the Gypsies in England is a mention in *A Dyalog of Syr Thomas More, knyght*, which says that in 1514 the King sent the lords to enquire into the death of Richard Hunne in the Lollard's Tower. One of the witnesses mentioned an Egyptian woman who had been lodging in Lambeth, but had gone overseas a month before, and who could tell marvellous things by looking into one's hand. Edward Hale in his *Chronicles* says that two ladies at a Court mummary in 1517 had their heads robed in a kind of gauze and tippers "Like the Egyptians" embroidered with gold: and again in 1520 he says that at a state banquet eight ladies came in attired "like to the Egyptians," very richly. The name appears again in Skelton's "Elynoure Rumminge" which was written about 1517, and again in his *Garland of Laurel* which was published in 1526 and in which the word "Gypsy" appears for the first time. The line runs:

"By Mary Gipsy, quod scripsi scripsi."

We know that some time about 1520 some "Gypsions" were entertained by the Earl of Surrey at Tendring Hall in Suffolk, and that in 1521 one William Cholmeley gave certain "Egyptions" at Thornbury forty shillings (equivalent to something like £40 in 1943 money), while in 1522 the churchwardens of Stratton, in Cornwall, received twenty pence from the "Egyptions" for the use of the churchyard. But in all these early English records there is not (in contrast to Scottish records) a single Gypsy name mentioned. Samuel Reid, in his *Art of Juggling* which was

published in 1612, is the first man to name an English Gypsy. He gives 1528 as the year in which the Egyptians invaded England and says that they were then in the south and earned a good living by palmistry, fortune-telling and cheating. They rode on horseback and wore strange apparel and their king was Giles Hather and their queen Kit Calot. Thornbury, however, in his *Shakespeare's England*, published in 1856, says that their chief in Henry VIII's time was Cock Lorel and that he was followed by Ratsee. Harrison, in his *Description of England*, which is prefixed to Holinshed's *Chronicle*, describes various forms of rogues then practised in England and adds :

“ They are now supposed, of one sex and another, to amount unto above ten thousand persons : as I have heard reported. Moreover, in counterfeiting the Egyptians roguis, they have devised a language among themselves, which they name Canting, but others pedlers' French, a speech compact thirty years since of English, and a great number of od words of their owne devising, without all order or reason ; and yet such is it as none but themselves are able to understand ; The first deviser thereof was hanged by the neck, a just reward no doubt for his desartes, and a common end to all of that profession.”

By 1530—the year in which the Egyptians danced before James V in Holyrood House and received forty shillings for doing so—they had made themselves so great a nuisance in England that an Act—the first of many repressive measures passed in England—was passed dealing with them. It says that :

“ Afore this tyme dyverse and many outlandyeshe People callynge themselves Egyptians, usyng no Crafte nore faicte of Merchaundyce had comen into this Realme and gone from Shire to Shire and Place to Place in greate Company, and used greate subtyll and crafty means to deceyve the People, beryng them in Hande

that they by Palmestre coulde telle Menne and Womens Fortunes and so many tymes by crafte and subtyltie had deceyved the People of theyr Money and also had comytted many and haynous Felonyes and Robberies to the great Hurte and Deceyte of the People that they had comyn amonge.’

And in order to stop further immigration it was enacted that :

“ From hensforth no suche Psone be suffred to come within this the Kynge’s Realme.”

If any did, they were to forfeit all their goods, and to be ordered to leave the country within fifteen days, and if they did not do so they were to be imprisoned. Furthermore, if “ any such stranger ” thereafter committed any murder, robbery, or other felony, and, upon being arraigned, he pleaded not guilty, the jury was to be composed “ altogether of Englysshemen ” instead of half Englishmen and half foreigners, which they were otherwise entitled to claim under an Act of Henry VI. All the Gypsies in England at the time the Act was proclaimed were to leave within sixteen days, or to be imprisoned and to forfeit their goods : but if any of these goods were claimed as stolen, they were upon proper proof to be forthwith restored to the owner. As an inducement—bribe would be a better word—to enforce the Act zealously, all Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs or Escheators, who seized the goods of any Gypsies, were to retain half of them as their own, and to account in the Court of Exchequer for the other half, and they were excused paying any fees or charges upon rendering the account.

The Act, of course, had no effect and does not seem to have been enforced with any vigour. There was a prosecution or two, but nothing serious happened until 1544 when a large band of Gypsies was arrested in Huntingdonshire, convicted and sentenced to deportation. They were taken to Calais, the nearest English port on the Continent.

Later in the same year some Gypsies arrested in Lincolnshire were sent to Norway. But for the rest they wandered about the country much as before. The Act had, however, made one great change in the law and one greatly to the disadvantage of the Gypsies, who had hitherto had a great advantage. Up to its passing, a Gypsy who murdered or robbed an Englishman could demand a jury composed half of Gypsies. And anyone can see what that meant. It meant that an Englishman in the same position was at a great disadvantage, and this meant inevitably that a number of the more rascally English took, if they possibly could, to the Gypsy way of life and consorted if possible with Gypsies, and the prospect was the more alluring to those with a distaste for work by reason of the Gypsy aversion to hard work. That it was not uncommon for Englishmen to consort with Gypsies is shown by the legislation against it. Indeed men and women were hanged for doing so. A severe penalty, but in Tudor times methods of dealing with vagabondage were as crude as they were unsuccessful.

The Act of 1530 was but the first of many. Though they were cruel and comprehensive—just to be a Gypsy was sufficient to bring a sentence of death (the last occasion on which this death penalty was enforced seems to have been at the end of Cromwell's dictatorship when thirteen were hung at one Suffolk assize)—they were not effective. It was estimated that in Queen Elizabeth's reign there were 10,000 Gypsies in England, and from this time onwards we find records of their baptism in parish churches. Gradually they came to be accepted as a part, if a regrettable part, of English life, though repressive legislation was enacted as late as 1908.

Deportation, however, was common. In 1665 at Edinburgh an order was passed banishing certain Gypsies to Jamaica and Barbados. In 1715 nine Scottish Gypsies—named Faa, Finnick, Lindsay, Roberston, Ross, Stirling and Yorstoun—were transported to Virginia. These seem to have been the first British Gypsies to be sent to America

(France probably deported some of hers), the forerunners of the many thousands now in the States. Portugal and Spain deported Gypsies to Africa and South America, and we did the same to Australia, where some of them rose to affluence. Almost every country in which Gypsies have settled has at one time or another banished them. Germany did so in 1497, Spain in 1499, France in 1504, England in 1531, Denmark in 1536, Moravia in 1538, Scotland in 1541, Poland in 1557, Venice in 1549, 1558 and 1588, and so on. But the Gypsies remained. No race, not even the Jews, have so firmly held to their way of life in the face of such vigorous attempts at suppression.

It would not be right to close this brief account of the beginnings of Gypsydom in Britain without some mention of tinkers and their speech. In England we do not use the word tinker much nowadays. It used to indicate a wandering smith, and then came to mean any wandering person who lived a certain sort of life and followed certain recognised and generally unconventional occupations. It soon became synonymous with Gypsy, since the Gypsies led the same sort of life and followed the same occupations, and it rapidly gave way to the new word. Nowadays we divide our wandering population quite arbitrarily, and very inaccurately, into tramps and Gypsies. The Gypsies are those that have caravans or wear rather odd clothes, the tramps are all the rest. We pay no attention to race.

In Scotland the word is still used : and in Scotland, too, it is synonymous with Gypsy. But the Scots speak of tinkler-Gypsies where we speak of Gypsies, and the combination suggests that there was at one time a recognisable, though small, distinction between the two. The tinkler was known in Scotland long before the arrival of the "Egyptians." He followed the same way of life, practised the same deceits, had the same occupations, but was yet different from the Egyptians. He was different in appearance, in the clothes he wore, in the language he spoke. (He was different, perhaps, because he had been there so very much longer. The English Gypsy after four hundred years

of England has forgotten a great deal of his language—Anglo-Romani is now a very corrupt tongue—and has married so frequently with the gorgio that often he does not resemble a Gypsy physically.) Anyway he was different, and the Scot recognised the difference. But the similarity in the way of life and customs was so close that before long he classed the two together as tinkler-Gypsies. In Scotland the original tinkler population more than held its own with the newcomers : in England it failed to do so.

Until comparatively recently Scotland was much more closely associated with Ireland than with England, and there was a constant traffic between the two countries. The tinkler-Gypsies, isolated from England and English Gypsies and helped by the wildness of the country they inhabited, have evolved a language of their own, which is a compound of Gaelic, Romani, cant and Shelta. Shelta is the language of the Irish tinkers. The word tinker is very far from dead in Ireland : the word Gypsy has never had any currency, for the Gypsies have never invaded Ireland in any numbers and if there is a Gypsy population in the island it must be a very small one. The wandering folk of Ireland are tinkers and they are quite distinct from Gypsies. Quite distinct : and yet obviously closely allied, so closely allied, in fact, that it has been suggested that they are a branch of the Romanies. They follow the same way of life ; are smiths, horse-dealers, fortune-tellers ; have many of the same customs. They are not just Irishmen who have taken to the road. They are a race. (One of them told Dr. Sampson that he could always recognise a tinker woman by her appearance, and James Arigho, a tinker friend of mine, supports this, maintaining that he can always tell a tinker of pure blood by his appearance.) They are a race distinct from, yet similar to the Gypsies. And they have a language of their own. It has long been known, of course, that itinerant tinkers have a jargon of their own. Shakespeare, who knew something about everything, refers to it in the first part of *King Henry IV* (Act 2, Sc. 4), when he makes Prince Henry boast that he



“can drink with any tinker in his own language.” That cannot, however, be taken to mean that Shakespeare knew of the existence of Shelta, only that he knew of the existence of cant. Shelta is not a jargon, it is a language. Furthermore, it was, until recently, a secret language—how secret will be realised when it is said that George Borrow was completely unaware of its existence.

Ireland was rich in secret languages—they are not as melodramatic as they sound—having no less than six, of which we have some knowledge to-day, and it is quite possible that there were others which have vanished altogether. The six are Ogham, Hisperic Latin, the corrupted Irish of the *Dúil Laithne* (which Professor Macalister has called *Bog Latin*), *Bérlae na Filed*, *Béarlagair na Saer*, and Shelta. All these languages are artificial. That is to say, they were made by learned men who introduced all sorts of archaic words and forms, borrowed from the Greek and the Latin, indulged in such devices as the use of words in a figurative sense, the reversal of words, the omission of a letter or a syllable, or the addition or insertion of letters or syllables. They were originally languages manufactured by scholars for the use of scholars, a means of concealing knowledge, of preserving certain knowledge within a comparatively narrow circle. Ogham is the most ancient of the six. There are those who maintain that it was the Druidical language, and was in existence at the time of Cæsar’s invasion of Gaul. (Druidism was the religion of Gaul at the time and Cæsar hints strongly that the headquarters were in Britain.) That the Druids had a secret language of their own is beyond doubt, but I confess—I am no authority and put this forward humbly—to doubting whether Ogham as we know it was that language. And there are those who maintain that it was still in existence in 1328. It is true that we are told that in that year there died one “Morish O’Gibellan . . . an exact speaker of the speech that is called ogham.” But I do not think that it was the Ogham of the monuments, of the Druids if you will. I think that Ogham at the time of O’Gibellan’s

death meant no more than "good literary Irish" as opposed to ordinary everyday Irish talk. Next in age comes Hisperic Latin (it should be Hisperic Latin and Irish) which was a language manufactured by the students in the monasteries, and dates back to somewhere around 600 A.D. The corrupted Irish of the book *Dúil Laithne* dates from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. I do not know what dates are given by the authorities for *Bérulae na Filed* (the language of the poets) and *Béarlagair na Saer* (the vernacular of the masons), but they, too, belong to the Middle Ages and were connected originally with the monasteries. The impact of Irish monasterial life and thought upon the Irish nation was very wide, and many people must have had the opportunity of picking up a word or two here and there of these secret languages. No doubt, too, there were from time to time adventurous or rebellious souls who cut adrift from the monasteries and took to the roads (as renegades they would find hospitality nowhere else) bearing with them the language of their craft. And finally, with the religious upheavals the masons and the smiths would be forced, many of them at any rate, to take their skill elsewhere. It is indeed not surprising that these secret languages should have spread by degrees beyond the bounds of their craft; what is surprising is that having done so they should still have remained secret.

Four of these six secret languages are altogether dead. Two, *Shelta* and *Béarlagair na Saer*, survive. Attention was first drawn to the existence of the latter as long ago as 1808 when a list of twenty words was given by P. McElligott in *The Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin*. In 1859 Edward FitzGerald, a Youghal architect, published a vocabulary of 250 words and six phrases. To-day we know some 400 words.

*Shelta* was discovered in 1876 by Charles Godfrey Leland, who stumbled across it near Bath. His own description of the discovery is given in his book *The Gypsies*. He came across an itinerant knife-grinder and talked to him in *Romani*. He found that he knew a little

of it (there are very few men on the roads who do not know a word or two) but the knife-grinder was not impressed. "We're a-givin' Romanes up very fast—all of us is," he remarked. "It's a-gettin' to be too blown. Everybody knows some Romanes now. But there is a jib that ain't blown," he added reflectively. "Back slang and cantin' and rhymin' is grown vulgar, and Italian always was the lowest of the lot. Now Romanes is genteel. I've heard there's actilly a book about it. But as for this other jib, it's very hard to talk. It's most all Old Irish, and they calls it *Shelter*."

From that humble beginning sprang great things. The Bath knife-grinder apparently knew no Shelta, and Leland admits that he was not impressed, assuming "that the man merely meant Old Irish." Leland meant by Old Irish, Gaelic (the expression is used by tramps on the roads to this day to indicate a man who speaks Gaelic) and was no more impressed by that than he would have been if a tramp had told him that Shelta was mainly Welsh. But a year later he was in Wales at Aberystwyth with E. H. Palmer, a brilliant linguist and an astonishing eccentric. Here they met a tramp, who was a man of some education, and who, hearing them talking Romani, spoke to them. Asked what he did for a living, he replied *Skelkin gallopas*, and shook both Leland and Palmer, both of whom had very extensive knowledge of Romani and the various jargons of the road, to the core. Asked what on earth he meant, he said "selling ferns," and that it was "Minklas Thari" (that is how Leland wrote it: more correctly, *Minker Tāral*) tinkers' talk, or Shelta. From this man Leland obtained the first vocabulary of the language. Some time later he had the luck to come across an Irish tramp in Philadelphia, named Owen MacDonald. He talked to this man in Romani, found that he knew a fair amount of it, and also "Old Irish," Welsh, Gaelic—I think that by this he must have meant Scots tinkler talk—and Shelta, though he only owned to the last after a good deal of pressure. From this man Leland took another and much

longer vocabulary. Ten years after his discovery of the language he published a long article in *The Academy* in which he suggests that knowledge of the language was very widespread, in fact he says, "I doubt if I ever took a walk in London, especially in the slums, without meeting men and women who spoke Shelta"—an obvious exaggeration. This article in *The Academy* aroused interest and brought forth short lists of Shelta words from T. H. Crofton and T. W. Norwood. These in turn brought forth another short list from G. A. Wilson, who was given it by a lady who had taken the words down from a tinker child on the island of Tiree, and who told Wilson that the child's mother, when she discovered what had happened, tried to persuade her that they were only the fruits of an active imagination; and also one from the Rev. J. F. M. French taken down in Co. Wexford. Crofton had already pointed out that a good deal of Shelta was merely Gaelic reversed, in other words, Gaelic back-slang, and Wilson went one better by showing that the numerals given by Leland were merely Gaelic numerals mis-spelt. This threw a pretty douche of cold water on the idea of a new and secret language, and might well have drowned it altogether but for David MacRitchie. MacRitchie had himself taken down a long list of words from tinkers in Arran, and believed that Leland was right. He wrote to John Sampson and persuaded him to take the matter up. He could not, and of course he knew it, have made a better choice. Sampson was a genius at this sort of thing. He had an enormous knowledge of Romani, a very wide knowledge of most of the jargons of the road and of the men and women who spoke them, great experience in taking down Romani from the lips of deep speakers, an expert knowledge of phonetics, and in addition to all this he was a man of great courage, indomitable will and incurable curiosity.

Sampson began work in 1890. He started in the slums of Liverpool (then, as now, very largely an Irish city) and the slums of Liverpool in those days were almost as dangerous as they were dirty. Indeed he describes them as "safe

only for the dispensary doctor and the Catholic priest." His first lists were taken from an itinerant knife-grinder named Brennan. This man, however, did not know, or pretended that he did not know, much Shelta (though he admitted to having an uncle who never spoke anything else unless he was obliged to do so), and Sampson soon moved on. He met, a little later, three men who worked together—two knife-grinders and an umbrella-mender—and he spent some time with them collecting words. One was called "Manni" Connor, another was called "The Shah" and the third was known as *Re-Meather*, which means Double Devil. They were an unpleasant trio. Indeed Sampson, who was not unaccustomed to unpleasant characters, said that he had never seen three more uncleanly and evil-looking men. But they spoke with astonishing fluency a language of their own which was made up of Romani, Shelta, flying cant and rhyming slang, and this was just what Sampson wanted. He collected from them in tinkers' taverns. His association with these three obviously could not last long under any circumstances, and the places in which he had to collect his words made it certain that it would come to an end under unpleasant conditions. Sampson described it thus : " On the last occasion I was in their company we were seated in an inner room with wooden table and sanded floor. For obvious reasons I had placed them on the bench against the wall, occupying, myself, the other side of the table. Something, I forget what, aroused suspicion in their minds, and there was an air of immense trouble which I hoped at any rate would not be mine. I saw Manni rise to get between me and the door, while *Re-Meather* was surreptitiously unbuckling his belt. Grasping the table with both hands, I turned it on its side, jamming them to the seat, the three blue and white pots of beer sliding down on them. Glancing back as I left the room, I saw those three worthies framed in a kind of triptych against the wall, and as I passed through this door I wished that I had more time to admire their astonished faces." If you have

ever seen the havoc that can be worked by an angry man armed with a heavy belt—and I have—you will realise how wise he was to leave quickly.

Quite undeterred by this experience he set about finding another Shelta speaker, and this time he was very lucky. He fell in with John Barlow, a tinker aged seventy-nine, and he managed to make friends with him. Barlow really spoke the language. He learned it from his mother and father in childhood, and he spoke it unmixed with cant or Romani. Furthermore, he was honest, refusing to make up a word if he did not know it, and he could recognise, and invariably did, a Gaelic as opposed to a Shelta word, for he was also a natural and fluent Gaelic speaker. From him Sampson obtained a most extensive vocabulary, some stories in Shelta and other useful bits of information. He also introduced Professor Kuno Meyer, a great Celtic scholar, to him. Sampson had little or no knowledge of Gaelic : Meyer had a great knowledge of it and was thus able to probe deeper into Barlow's words and to put the whole enquiry on a rather more advanced footing. Barlow was himself convinced that Shelta was not only a secret language (he frequently stressed the fact that his father had warned him never to divulge it to strangers) but a very-ancient one. He maintained, in fact, that the speakers of Shelta originally were not Irish at all, but the old travellers who first came to Ireland. Sampson believed that it was a secret language of great antiquity, which had acquired a basis of Irish at an early stage of its development. Professor Meyer after his investigations came to the same conclusion, and went further, in that he allied it to the other secret languages of Ireland.

There can be no doubt at all that Shelta is the language of the Irish tinkers, handed down from father to son, and spoken habitually, and in preference to Gaelic and English, by certain families. But I do not think that any great antiquity can be claimed for it. Some of it certainly goes back about as far as it can possibly go back, some of it certainly has connections with the ancient secret languages

of Ireland, but much of it is merely Gaelic reversed, a good deal of it is merely old Gaelic left unaltered, and some of it, it seems to me (but Professor Macalister, who is the authority on the subject, makes no mention of it in his book, so I am probably wrong), is Welsh in origin. Professor Macalister has given in his book a complete—as complete as is known, that is—vocabulary of the language and shows the etymology of many, indeed most words. Some, like *kam* = son, *i.e.*, *mac* reversed, are easy : others are not at all easy, and for some he gives no etymology at all. *Dāl'on*, meaning God, is one of these : though I cannot imagine why he has rejected the possibility (probability to my mind) of its being a corrupt form of *Duilem*, which means Creator. After that temerity, let me hasten to say how right he is in stressing the Englishness of Shelta. In its idiom and construction it is, as he very properly stresses, much more English than Irish. Obviously an Irish language originally it must have been fashioned into its present form by speakers whose main language was English. The words, many of them, are Irish words in common use, but they are used in a manner which no native speaker of Irish would dream of using. I know that he is absolutely right here. And I have had the truth of it driven home to me many times, albeit unconsciously, by a man who spoke Irish fluently as his native tongue and knew Shelta very well indeed. He used the same words in the two tongues—you could make him do so with a little care—but he used them quite differently. This Englishness of Shelta is, I think, most intriguing. It makes the whole thing so much more mysterious. And no one, so far as I know, has attempted the task of showing how it came about, nor even suggested a theory.

There seems to be an idea that Shelta is no longer used very much by the tinkers and that Béarlagair na Saer is no longer used at all. It is a completely erroneous idea. Shelta is still used considerably, even in England, no longer perhaps as a connected whole, a vital and separate speech (though I do know a Shelta speaker), but many

words and phrases are very much alive. And the same is true of Béarlágair na Saer. This has long since ceased to be a language, but many of the words are used habitually by Shelta speakers, or at any rate the Shelta speaker I know best. Many of the words in this language are ordinary modern Irish corrupted—*i.e.*, *cabhaill* = horse, modern Irish *capall*—others are older forms, and there is some back slang and rhyming slang. I do not know where or how James Arigho picked up Béarlágair na Saer (I think that probably many of its words have been incorporated in Shelta), but he uses a number of words from it in his speech, and uses them absolutely naturally as he does Shelta and Romani words. He is a native speaker of Gaelic, knows Shelta very well indeed and quite a bit of Romani. He does not know Béarlágair na Saer as such, but he does know when he uses words from it that they are not Shelta words. He never muddles them up. If asked what they are he says (without hesitation as a rule) "Old Irish." It is interesting, too, to note the connections in which he uses some of them and their Shelta and Romani equivalents. For example, he is interested (what Irishman is not?) in horses. His usual word for horse is *capall*, which is modern Irish, but if he desires to be explicit and to indicate a gelding, as opposed to an entire, he invariably uses the word *kuri*, which is Shelta. He uses the Béarlágair word *cabhaill* on occasions, but only when he is talking about horses that are dead, *i.e.*, "I once had a horse." I have twice heard him use *lapac* for horse (the word is not given by Macalister, but Arigho maintains that it is good Shelta, and it is obviously back slang for *capall*) and on both occasions he was referring to a Derby favourite that did not win. He uses the Romani word *grai* only when talking to Gypsies. So, too, with the word "woman." Normally he uses the Béarlágair word *be* (but this is a good Irish word that has fallen into disuse, except occasionally in poetry, rather than a true Béarlágair word) to indicate any young woman of pleasing appearance. He invariably uses the Shelta word *bewer* to indicate any woman of doubt-



ful morals or unpleasing appearance. This word, by the way, has become current among English vagrants. I have frequently heard it used by men and women who have no connection whatsoever with either tinkers or Gypsies. Another Béarlagair word that is quite commonly used by English tramps is *long-shuain*, meaning a bed, which they pronounce *longan*, not a bad approximation to the Irish pronunciation.

None of the Romani words for tinker are complimentary and most are the reverse. Gypsies do not like tinkers, though they do on occasions marry with them—Dr. Sampson knew a Liverpool tinker named Murray who had married a Romani woman; Helen Shevlin's husband was an Irish tinker; two of James Arigho's sons and one of his daughters, though themselves pure-blooded Irish tinkers, married Gypsies. I think the Gypsy dislike of the tinker springs very largely from the similarity between the two in the way they live and the way they earn a living, and because wherever the two meet the Gypsy is blamed for sins that more often than not are the tinker's. This is certainly the case in Wales and down the Welsh border, a region that experienced a big invasion of travelling Irish, but elsewhere in England the Irish tinker is a rarity and the Gypsy dislike has been transferred to the tramps and vagrants for whose sins they too often get blamed. Equally the tramps and vagrants of England blame the Gypsies, generally I think unjustly, for the petty crimes of the roadsides. The Irish tinker, however, and this applies equally to the travelling Irish of Wales and the border counties, has no particular dislike for the Gypsies. He either admires them openly or is utterly indifferent to them.

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### III

## TABOOS

ONE does not connect the word "taboo" with the quiet lanes and wind-swept heaths of Britain. It is too closely bound up with the names of Fraser and Crawley and Malinowski for that, with ancient religions or with the most primitive and pagan of savages. Or, if we do not happen to be familiar with *The Golden Bough* or *The Mystic Rose* or *Savages and Sex*, we may perhaps connect it with retired Anglo-Indians in a "school-tie" sense. In fact, we are likely to connect it with almost anything but the English countryside. Yet not so many years ago, certainly within the memory of many men and women now living, there was an elaborate system of taboos in force among English Gypsies, and, though that system in all its elaboration has died out, it would be a mistake to suppose that all the taboos have been discarded. So far from that being the case, there has, I think, been a perceptible increase in the observance of some in recent years.

Somebody once said—I have searched an extensive library but cannot at the moment give the reference—that a race without taboos is a race without virility, and it is a fact that the dropping of taboo observance is frequently the prelude to decline. The majority of taboos are connected with women, death and food, and the vast majority with women. It is when these begin to loosen that a decline not infrequently follows; of that it would be possible to give innumerable examples. And it is a fact that until about the close of the third quarter of the last century an extensive system of taboos connected with women was observed by English Gypsies, and that at that time the English Gypsies were more coherent, purer in blood, and generally more prosperous than they have been since.

Of this branch of Romani lore, the great authority is

Mr. T. W. Thompson, and I am indebted to him for much of the information contained in this chapter. His enquiries were made among midland and northern Gypsies, who seem to have retained more of the ancient customs of their race than those in the south, but it should be remembered that they were made when the taboos he mentions had ceased to be widely observed, and that the men and women from whom he obtained the information themselves for the most part only knew of these taboos, elaborate as they were, in decline. We have no information about the full elaboration of taboo among English Gypsies, for it was in decline before a *rai* arose to record.

But I wonder sometimes if any taboo ever dies absolutely. I have heard a young English Gypsy declare something to be *mochardi* (unclean) when he could have had no experience of the ancient taboo, and when no other member of his family had any ideas on the subject. And I also knew an old south-country Gypsy, a man who had never travelled widely, who regarded many matters in much the same light as some of Thompson's midland Gypsies, and this old man observed certain food taboos punctiliously until the day of his death.

The word *mochardi* means unclean. Dogs and cats are *mochardi* in the sense that they are regarded by many Gypsies as dirty animals. Thompson was told that this was because they lick themselves all over, and that the horse was not regarded as *mochardi* because it does not. So Thompson's Gypsies would drink after a horse, but not after a dog. Amos Churen (who loathed cats) was an exceptionally clever trainer of dogs and treated his dogs with unfailing kindness, but nevertheless he regarded them as dirty animals. He would not allow them in his tent nor would he allow them to lick his face, though he did not mind them licking his hands. I do not know if he would have drunk after them, for I did not unfortunately come across Thompson's work until after his death, and so did not ask him, but I imagine not, although he had no misgivings about eating rabbits that they caught. This does

not look as though he regarded dogs as particularly unclean, and some German Gypsies (according to Wittich, quoted by Thompson) train their dogs to steal meat from the butchers' shops, which indicates that they, too, do not regard the dog in quite the same light as the midland Gypsies of the middle of the last century. But I think the fact of the meat they catch being cooked makes all the difference. Incidentally, some Hungarian Gypsies I knew, who would cheerfully eat carrion, regarded cats as unmentionably dirty. A cup washed in water in which hands or face had been washed would be regarded as *morchardi*, dirty, by the vast majority of Gypsies to-day.

A definite distinction must be drawn between the word *mochardi* as applied to women in general and as applied to certain acts and things that may legitimately be described as dirty. It is a definite distinction, but it is at the same time indefinable. Thompson's informants would not define it nor explain it more clearly than by describing it as part of their religion. In this sense *mochardi* has nothing to do with dirtiness. It means unclean in the ceremonial sense only. At one time there can be no doubt that English Gypsy women, even when in normal health and circumstances, were regarded as unclean by their men; not unclean in the dirty sense, but as a source of pollution, as dangerous to the health and strength of man. While this is no longer so, traces of it still linger here and there, and a woman not in full health is still in many families the subject of taboo.

I first came across taboo in connection with Gypsy women when I came to know Amos Churen fairly well, and almost all my personal experience of taboo among English Gypsies has come from the same source. Amos would not eat or drink anything that a woman had stepped over, nor would he touch a plate or a cup or any food utensil that a woman had stepped over. Indeed in such an event the food would be given to the dogs and the utensils destroyed. It would all be *mochardi*. This taboo is mentioned at some length by Thompson who gives many

examples. Among the strictest midland Gypsies it was taken to great lengths—one man refusing to drink any water from a tap in his house because the pipes ran underground and the women must therefore step over them. Another made his women take a detour of three miles to reach a village only a mile away rather than allow them to cross the stream from which he drew his drinking water and which lay across the direct route. This prohibition against stepping over water is, of course, very old and is not confined to Gypsies. Fraser in *The Golden Bough* mentions the prohibition in Greece against a woman at the time of menstruation crossing a running stream, and a similar ban exists in many parts of the world. The Gypsy prohibition, however, is not confined to the time of menstruation nor, of course, only to English Gypsies. Coppersmith Gypsies have just the same taboos, and so have some of the most primitive of the Hungarian Gypsies. Thompson mentions an extension of this taboo among some south-country Gypsies so far as food and food-vessels are concerned in that the prohibition is made to apply to men as well. This, as he points out, is obviously a modern addition. I have not myself come across it nor have I heard of it, but another taboo mentioned for the same south-country Gypsies, and divulged to Thompson by the same man, was known to and observed by Amos Churen. Any food in which a hair was found was instantly thrown away. I did not see this happen to Amos, but he told me about it, and I have no doubt he meant what he said.

He did not, however, have any misgivings about women's hair. Among the midland Gypsies a woman was not allowed to let her hair down and comb it out in the presence of men; in fact, she could not do so anywhere except in her tent unless she was quite certain that only women and girls were present. This applied even to the woman's husband, for Thompson's informant told him that his mother never let her hair down outside her tent even when alone with her family. But this taboo was evidently not common to all midland Gypsies, for this man

knew of families in which it was not observed and told Thompson how his father and his uncle reacted to the breaking of the ban by the ignorant—his father by getting up and walking away and his uncle by outspoken remonstrance. Amos had no knowledge of any such taboo, or if he had ignored it, for I often saw women combing their hair in his presence, and I have, in fact, not noticed any inhibitions about hair in the south country Gypsies I know, beyond the hair in food taboo mentioned to me by Amos. Nor do I think it has ever been a widespread taboo in Britain, for in one English and one Welsh family it was the custom for a girl already betrothed to warn off any other man who attempted to court her by letting her hair down, a custom I have also heard described by Gypsies in Denmark.

The deportment of women in camp was also a matter of regulation. Here, as in the stepping over food or water, there could be defilement without any actual contact. Even the way in which the women sat was a matter for regulation. According to Thompson's information, there were two recognised postures. Unmarried girls were allowed to sit only with their legs crossed and their feet tucked underneath them : married women might sit with their legs straight out if they so desired provided that they did not separate them, and this proviso was most important. On this point Thompson's two informants were quite definite : if in the presence of men the women must sit with their legs pressed tightly together. One of his informants was not definite about the distinction between married and unmarried women, but both made it quite clear that the legs-together position was not due to any question of modesty, for the rule applied with equal force if the only man present was husband or father or brother. I cannot say that I have ever noticed anything of this sort in force among the Gypsies with whom I am personally acquainted. The most usual sitting position for Gypsy women is cross-legged with the feet tucked under them, but in the families I know the women sit as they please and

there is certainly no prescribed difference as between married and unmarried women. This was not the only rule of deportment in force among the older midland Gypsies by any means. Indeed, there were a great many and some of them were taken to great lengths in a few families. Only one other concerning the actual deportment of women in the camp need be mentioned here. A woman must never pass in front of a man when he is sitting down, even if he is her husband she must pass behind him. This taboo is widespread among Gypsies. It occurs all over Europe, though it is not observed with equal force everywhere, and I have met it in France, Italy, Austria, Germany, Hungary and Denmark. In England, Thompson mentions several families in which it was scrupulously observed, and I know a number in which it is still observed. Indeed it is probably true to say that the rule that a woman must pass behind a man who is sitting down is known to almost every English Gypsy of middle-age and over, and is still observed by a great many of them. I am not, however, certain that the reason for the rule (which is, of course, the fear of defilement) is known. Amos Churen, in whose family it was scrupulously observed, knew that it was *mochardi* for a woman to pass in front of a sitting man, but in the other families in which I have seen it observed I have never heard anything to suggest that the *mochardi* idea in this connection was known to them. It has, in fact, become a mere custom unrelated now to the ceremonial uncleanness taboo.

"At and following childbirth a Gypsy woman is considered a greater potential source of danger than at other times, and special precautions are necessary to protect men from possible contamination," says Thompson. It is a commonplace of Gypsy folk-lore that a woman has her own set of crockery for some time after she has given birth to a child. There is also a period of quarantine during which she is regarded as particularly *mochardi*. This period varies. A month is usual among English Gypsies. One family observed a month and a day, another three months,

but regarded only the first really strictly, another three weeks, while I met a woman not long ago who told me that she was subject to restrictions from the time she first knew she was going to have a child until three months after the child was born. She lived in central Cornwall all her life and for England she must be regarded as very exceptional. But so long a period is not, I think, exceptional for the Gypsies of German Silesia, though over most of Germany a month seems to be the accepted period. In Hungary it seems to be two months and in Italy only a fortnight, but my experience of Central European Gypsies is not really sufficiently wide to justify generalisations.

Amos Churen told me that his grandmother had a separate tent put up for her whenever she was going to have a baby and that this tent was destroyed a month after the birth. Thompson states that Lias Boswell's grandmother always had a separate tent for the birth of her children. The two women must have lived at about the same time, the one in the midlands and the other on the Welsh-English border, and this suggests that at one time the practice was widespread in England. And there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that it is the ancient Gypsy practice. Wittich says that among German Gypsies births are not allowed to take place inside a living waggon as it and all its contents would have to be destroyed or sold to the gorgios ; and that the woman is usually delivered on a makeshift straw bed underneath the waggon. In an unpublished manuscript, quoted by Thompson, he varies this by saying that a woman is usually got out of her waggon into a tent for childbirth. Should she be taken ill too suddenly to permit of this, as many things as possible are thrown out of the waggon, anything that remains becoming defiled by the birth. On such occasions, he states, men may not offer the least assistance. When the late Dr. Sampson visited the Greek Gypsies at Liverpool in 1896 he noticed that a woman who had recently given birth to a child had a special tent reserved for her. In 1930 in Italy, near Susa, two women of a Gypsy tribe



had babies on successive days—they were married to the same man—and each had a special tent. The father, who was quite unperturbed by this family crisis, lived in the big family tent. A fortnight after the births the tents were burned by the roadside and the wives returned to a normal existence. I do not know if the special tent is used and destroyed nowadays by any English Gypsies, but I do know that births do take place in the living-waggon in some families at any rate. In one recent case of which I have personal knowledge everything that could be moved out was moved out beforehand, and such movable objects as were in the van at the time of delivery were afterwards burnt. And this was in a family with a large admixture of gorgio blood ! Amos, so he told me, always put up a tent for himself and saw to it that everything that was in his wife's tent at the time was destroyed at the end of her quarantine.

As might be expected, a woman at menstruation is especially *mochardi*, and there is a wealth of material on these taboos. Very young babies are *mochardi*. Amos Churen, as was the case with many old Gypsies, would not touch, let alone kiss, a very young baby, even, as he told me himself, his own. This taboo appears to have died out entirely among English Gypsies, though babies' napkins are still regarded as *mochardi*. During childhood no taboos apply. A female child from babyhood to young womanhood is not accounted unclean, nor is it considered possible that she can be defiled. Her underclothes, for example, can be washed with the men's clothes. She can be with her mother after childbirth and yet live with the men and boys of the family, though she must be careful not to touch the food or crockery until she has washed her hands.

At one time, in some of the midland families at any rate, it used to be the custom for the husband to give his wife a new pair of gloves on the last day of her quarantine and she would wear them for some weeks afterwards when cooking or handling food or crockery. This seems to have been a local taboo entirely. Thompson mentions it for

only four of the midland families—Boswells, Herons, Grays and Smiths—and I have never heard of it among south country Gypsies.

But the taboos connected with women's clothing were known at least in part to both Amos Churen and David Burton. These taboos are also known to German and Hungarian Gypsies, and so are probably of great age. It was a strict rule that women's clothing must not be washed with the men's. Women's clothing was strictly *mochardi*. Thompson gives an excellent account of this taboo as described to him by Caroline Boswell. Wittich, himself a Gypsy, described it for Germany. Not only must women's clothes not be washed with men's, they must not be brought into contact with food, they must not even be hung out to dry with the clothes of the men, and under no circumstances must a man touch them. In varying degrees the midland Gypsies and the German Gypsies observed these taboos. Neither Amos Churen's family nor David Burton's observed them in their entirety, but both Amos and David knew all about most of them, and neither would allow male and female clothing to be washed together. David would not allow female clothing to be dried where he could see it.

No distinction is drawn between the sexes during childhood. They are, in fact, regarded as neuters. At what age a male child becomes defilable is uncertain. Probably the majority of Gypsies in England no longer give the matter serious thought, but in any case it varies from family to family—as early as ten in some families, according to Thompson, and as late as thirteen in others. A female child becomes subject to uncleanness taboos at her first menstruation. Thompson is not definite on this point, because the Boswells from whom he obtained most of his information never mentioned women's periodic disability. David Burton was very reticent on this point also, but Amos Churen had no inhibitions about mentioning it and was quite definite about it, as also is another friend of mine, James Arigho, who is not unacquainted

with Romani ways, having rubbed shoulders with them most of his long life. And as the change takes place at this time among most other people who have similar taboos, I think it may safely be presumed for all Gypsies, though one or two families may make the change a little earlier.

Among German Gypsies the taboos connected with menstruation are many, and so far as I know or have been able to find out (it is, in my experience, harder to get information on this subject than on any other) are observed as scrupulously now as they were when Wittich wrote. I think it probable that among the purer-blooded English Gypsies there are to-day more taboos observed in this connection than in any other, but I have very little information on this point, and for once Thompson is not completely satisfying. On this point, however, there can be no doubt. Women at this time are regarded as especially dangerous. Wittich, quoted by Thompson from an unpublished manuscript, is very definite on this point and gives many examples of what may not be done by a menstruous woman. I do not know how many of these prohibitions are current among English Gypsies ; probably they all were at one time, probably only a few are now. But two that are mentioned by Wittich have come within my personal experience. A woman may not mention her infirmity, even to her husband. A menstruous woman may not cook food or touch food intended for a man. Both these taboos are observed to-day among English Gypsies, though I do not know how widely.

Amos Churen told me that the only way he knew when his wife was temporarily unwell was because someone else did his cooking for him. David Burton would never mention this sort of thing at all, partly I think because he was an exceptionally nice-minded man, but mainly, I am sure, because he did regard all this as his religion, a thing to be observed and not discussed. So I do not know what happened in his family, but I think that any taboos were probably more faithfully observed there than in that of Amos Churen. James Arigho, whose travels are constant

and far-flung, told me that all true Gypsies observe this taboo, that a woman shall not mention her infirmity to a man, no matter how intimately she may know him. That a menstruous woman shall not cook food or touch food intended for a man seems to follow as a matter of course, though it need not do so. Amos did not tell me that his wife would not tell him when she was temporarily unwell, he told me that he knew it because she would not cook for him. I have no doubt that this happened, too, in David Burton's tent, for David was as particular on food matters as Amos. James Arigho also observed this taboo. He had no objection to his wife discussing her infirmity at the time, but every objection to her cooking for him at that time. And I have found this to be the case also, even in such half-bred families as the Mathews, Lanes, Pages, Toogoods, Smallbones and Whites of the south country. That being so, I am prepared to believe that it also exists in the purer blooded Stanleys, Coopers, Burtons, Smiths, Lees, Ayres, Lovells, Boswells, Grays and so on. It is, in any case, not an entirely Gypsy taboo. Fraser in *The Golden Bough* gives a number of examples, from English folk-lore, of the same thing. Thompson has come across one gorgio family (who claimed Gypsy descent) in which it is firmly believed that if a menstruous woman touches raw meat that is going to be kept for any length of time, in pickle for example, it will rot. This family once had two hams from one of their own pigs go bad, and attributed this to the woman who was employed to salt them being menstruous at the time. They maintain, too, that meat that is going to be cooked straight away will not be so nice if touched by a woman during her menses, and one of the family at any rate believes that this also applies to cakes, pastry and other things made of flour. The head of this family did not approve of women handling meat at any time. I could give several similar examples from Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset peasantry, and I am quite sure that the fear of menstruous blood is even in these days much more general

than might be believed. One Hampshire shepherd, whom I knew well and who died only last year, always made his wife wear gloves when she handled raw meat. I do not know that he prevented her cooking when she was menstruous (I think not, but he was an excellent cook himself), for she was dead before I really got to know him, but I do know that he would not allow her to touch flour while she was menstruous. He maintained that bread so touched went sour. I have found this belief in connection with flour more common than in connection with meat myself, but the belief that meat that is going to be pickled will quickly go bad if handled by a woman in her menses is still common in the isolated districts of Hampshire and Wiltshire, and, so I understand, in Yorkshire.

<sup>12</sup> When the full elaboration of taboo was in force among English Gypsies there must have been punishments enforced upon those who wilfully or thoughtlessly broke them. There are such punishments enforced to-day among German Gypsies. We have no record of them unfortunately. Gradually as the taboo weakened families began to contain both clean and defiled members, and the realisation that nothing very terrible happened to the latter yet further weakened the taboo. With the weakening came a gradual but increasing influx of gorgio and mumper blood and a consequent further weakening. Time was when a Boswell would not shake hands with a gorgio. That time is long past, and many a Boswell has taken a gorgie to wife. Yet even so, even though the full elaboration of taboo is altogether dead and forgotten, even though many of the taboos are now not observed though not perhaps wholly forgotten, there lingers something at the back of the Gypsy mind and, like the language, it is apt to well up again in unexpected places. And the man who observes taboos to-day is not laughed at. He is regarded with respect, even with some little awe. The religion is not wholly dead. I do not myself believe that it will ever die.

## IV

## MARRIAGE

“LEES recordin’ to rights should marry wi’ Lees,” said Ira Lee to me once. “We didn’t oughter marry outa de name.” And he went on to tell me that in the past it had been a rule in his family that they should marry Lees. He himself married his first cousin Sophia Lee, but the rule has long since lapsed, for I have met many Lees who have not observed it. In any case I very much doubt if it was ever a rule so much as a custom, and as a custom it can be found in several other Gypsy families such as the Smiths, Grays and Herons. Beyond any measure of doubt, as anyone who cares to study the genealogical tables that have been prepared of some of the best families can see for himself, in-marriage was the common practice. For that matter, though many if not most of the old rules and customs have largely collapsed under the pressure of time and the growth of towns, in-marriage is still very common among Gypsies, and particularly so in the best Gypsy families. Thompson finds from a long and close study of the genealogy of English Gypsies that ascendant and descendant relatives, and brothers and sisters, have been regarded by all but one or two people as prohibited mates : that a small but appreciable minority of men have married their nieces or aunts, the former more frequently than the latter, and their brother’s daughters most frequently of all : that alliances between first cousins have been very popular and in some of the best families exceedingly common : that, generally speaking, first cousins have been preferred to second as marriage partners : that in two out of the three families for which very full particulars can be given ortho-cousins have married much more often than cross-cousins, and it is noteworthy that these two families are composed of Gypsies who have preserved the old customs, or, alternatively, the Romani language, rather better than

most. In the matrilineal families these ortho-cousins have generally been the children of two sisters, the children of two brothers in the remainder. Thompson, of course, goes much deeper into the matter than that, but enough has been said to show that in-marriage is a common practice. Indeed the only marital bar would appear to be common parentage. There is one certain record of a man marrying his grand-daughter and another of a man marrying his half-sister, while there is another case of marriage with a half-sister that was strongly suspected but not proved. These are isolated incidents though, and do not in any way invalidate the common parentage bar. So far as marriages between uncles and nieces, and aunts and nephews are concerned they have never been common, though a list compiled over all the years in which Gypsies in this country have been studied would probably reach formidable, but misleading dimensions. Almost all these marriages have proved to be permanent partnerships, and not a few of them have been productive.

Gypsies, it will be realised, hold rather different views on marriage to those current elsewhere in the country. Polygamy among English Gypsies has not been uncommon, though I think that here again the formidable list that no doubt could be compiled would be rather misleading. There are, of course, some well-known cases in literature : George Borrow's reference to Riley Boswell and his two wives in *Ramano Lavo-Lil*, for example, and Francis Hindes Groome's reference to Charlie Pinfold and his three wives in *Gypsy Folk-tales* ; and I think that a certain measure of polygamous households has always existed among English Gypsies. It is a rule, or at any rate a custom, that is enforced, among certain primitive peoples who allow polygamy, that a man's co-wives must be sisters, or at any rate near kinswomen : and judging from the composition of the more permanent polygamous households that we know to have existed among English Gypsies in modern times, it would seem that this was so with their ancestors. Anyhow, sixteen of the twenty-four men recorded as having

had more than one wife at the same, and for a considerable, time were living during the period in question with either two or three sisters : whilst it is likely that two more were similarly circumstanced, and probable that another two had been earlier in their lives, though for only a short time. Moreover, one of the latter had a mother and her daughter as co-wives during the last ten years he spent in England. One of the four who remain for consideration had a mother and her two daughters as co-wives for the greater part of a long married life. The three remaining men did not, it would seem, at any time share their homes among near kinswomen. In general, in polygamous households, two or three wives seems to have been usual, and these have almost always been Gypsies. There is, I believe, a record of a Gypsy with two gorgie wives. And there are, of course, records of more than three wives. Thompson has a record for 1922 of a man with seven wives. I have known one man with two wives and one with three, the former marrying two unrelated gorgie women. These wives are not married all at once (though one midland Gypsy is reputed to have married two sisters at the same time), but acquired as time goes on. And it may be that a younger sister just follows in her elder's footsteps. These co-wives in English Gypsydom do not live together, but have separate tents and run separate families, and there does not seem to be, or to have been, any difference in status between them, no "senior" wife or anything like that.

It is all very shocking, of course, if you care to look at it like that. But it should be remembered that Gypsies, no matter how anglicised they may have become, are not "English." They are orientals. Other races, other manners. I well remember some years before the war staying at the same hotel in France as a fabulously rich oriental. He had four "wives" (three of them English and the fourth German) and they all lived together. It was a good hotel, too. Other races, other manners. And, if you find the eastern view of marriage among English Gypsies shocking, there are yet some shocks to come.



At one time it does appear to have been the custom among certain English Gypsies that a man had "rights" over his wife's younger, or supposedly younger, sisters before they acquired official husbands. There are, in fact, substantiated records of this for one family, and it may well have been a general custom in the distant past. And in this connection it is worthy of note that, among the Santals, a man's unmarried younger brothers are permitted to share his wife with him until they acquire permanent wives of their own, while it is considered perfectly correct for a man to cohabit with his wife's younger sisters provided they are agreeable. So far as I know the custom has now completely died out among English Gypsies—it was still practised by some German Gypsy families a few years ago—and for that matter polygamy is dying very rapidly. These customs had their roots in the dim past of the race, they were never merely licentious practices.

The fact that a woman might be an unmarried wife to her sister's husband, even the fact that she might have a child by him, did not prevent her from acquiring a husband of her own. Indeed, such cases as there have been among English Gypsies in comparatively recent times have been rather on the lines of trial marriages—a few might even perhaps rank as examples of unstable polygamy—than on the lines of "automatic" rights. Trial marriages have not been uncommon among English Gypsies, for I think that many of the brief first marriages of women who have afterwards settled down to a long and happy married life with a second husband can truly be described as "trial" marriages, and I have come across examples myself quite recently. Here, of course, the practice is no whit different from that of some gorgie who make a commonplace of divorce, except that very few Romani women appear to marry more than twice. And, even so, the deliberate practice of trial marriage appears to have been confined in the main to one family.

It is difficult to reconcile much of this with the very high standard set by Gypsies for their women so far as modesty

and chastity is concerned. It is quite beyond dispute that among pure-blooded English Gypsy families there is still a very strong insistence on pre-nuptial chastity. At one time Scottish Gypsies demanded definite proof of a bride's virginity at the time of her marriage. And at one time—even perhaps within the last hundred years—English Gypsy girls used to wear a virginal girdle, made of wool mounted on catskin, from about the age of twelve until the wedding day. It was fastened on by the mother every morning and removed by the mother every night, and it was carried before the girl as a token of her maidenhood when she was married. Moreover, according to Philip Murray, who told the late Dr. Sampson about it, it was then kept by the husband until it was required by his eldest daughter and so on. Thompson has never been able to confirm this statement by Murray—Murray was an Irish tinker who married into one of the many Gypsy Smith families—but as proofs of a bride's virginity were customarily demanded by Spanish and French Gypsies, and are still demanded by many of the Gypsies of eastern Europe both in Europe and in the United States, to which country many families have migrated, and as it is known that virginal girdles were worn by the Spanish Gypsies, it is not improbable that some steps of a similar nature were taken in this country. In this connection it is, perhaps, worth noting that Amos Churen once said to me : “ Our gels was proper looked arter times. Morn' an' night I heard tell.” I could not get anything more out of him, and it may have no relevance, but we were talking of marriage. So far as I know, no proof of maidenhood is now required by any English Gypsies—indeed, in view of the prevalent way of getting married, it would scarcely be possible—but a very high standard has always been set in these matters in Gypsy families. There seems to be some evidence, or rather some suggestion of a tradition, that in the dimmer past a Gypsy girl found guilty of prostitution was buried alive. Certainly up to quite recently a girl found guilty of prostitution was invariably disowned by

her family. Furthermore, in Scotland, at any rate and within perhaps the last hundred years, the man who wronged an unmarried Gypsy girl did so at the risk of his life. But prostitution among Gypsy girls is very uncommon. Crabb, writing more than a hundred years ago, found it to be so among the New Forest Stanleys and Lees. George Borrow found it to be so, and Ursula showed him clearly enough what she thought about loose-living, even the merest suggestion of it. And modern investigators have found no reason to think that things have changed, at least so far as the purer-blooded families are concerned. Among them the standard is as high as ever it was. In some other families there has, I think, been a slight falling off recently, due, I am convinced, not to any fault in the Romani blood, but rather to an infusion of gorgio blood. Marriages between *Romanichals* and gorgios are much more common than they used to be, and, even more important in many ways, there is now much more intercourse between the Gypsy and the gorgio, and, unfortunately, it is rarely that a Romani marries the better type of gorgio, rarely that they associate at all freely with the better types. This has undoubtedly had some effect, but the cases in which it has had any marked effect, in which the standard has been markedly lowered, are few and far between. But they do exist. It would be a mistake, however, to judge by the few *diddikai* families, in which a moral standard is noticeable mainly by its absence ; a still greater mistake to judge by the young women, who garbed as Gypsies used to infest the downs at Epsom of a night in Derby week, who none of them could boast a drop of Romani blood, who came from the back streets of Soho on return tickets, and who mixed pilfering and prostitution as occasion demanded.

I have myself always found Gypsy girls to be most modest and chaste in their bearing (this does not apply to their speech : verbal chastity is not noticeable among Gypsies) and in this my observations agree with those of other modern investigators. How to reconcile this with

the undoubted, if infrequent, occurrence of cohabitation between a man and his wife's unmarried younger sisters is a problem. Custom notoriously dies hard, and it may well once have been customary. It does not in any case invalidate the general rule. But if there can be little or no doubt about the exceptionally high standard of pre-nuptial chastity, there does seem to be some doubt about the general standard of morals after marriage. I am not, here, referring to the frequency with which young Gypsy couples have married only to part again after a short time. Some of these marriages last only a few days, some a month or two, some perhaps a year. In some cases they may properly be termed "trial" marriages—though, as I have said, the deliberate practice of trial marriage appears to have been confined to one family—in some it means no more than that the couple quickly discover they have made a mistake and as quickly take steps to remedy it. Almost invariably the persons concerned marry again soon and remain steadfast to their second partners. The number of marriages that collapse after a year or two are few, and the number of men and women who change their partners more than once are also comparatively few, though in a minority it does occur more often, and in some of them (as in some gorgios) it develops into what might almost be called a disease. But none of this is anyway different from events in other and more "advanced" races. Certainly it cannot be taken as a sign of immorality. But there are hints to be found in this writer and that that the morals of Gypsy women apparently permanently married are not all they might be. Miss Eileen Lyster, in her book *The Gypsy Life of Betsy Wood*, states that while a casual love affair with a gorgio was uncommon and did not meet with the approval of the other women, there was no disapproval of a woman "who lured another woman's husband to be her lover for a season, and the forsaken spouse, after a transport of rage and grief, would usually set herself to win another mate. But although these practices were rather admired as feats of skill than condemned,

most of the family elected to live faithfully with the lover of their choice." That does not sound to me as if the practice was very widespread. And I must say that I have found nothing myself to suggest that the standard of morality among married Gypsy women in this country is low. Against this must be set the punishments for infidelity on the part of women—men do not appear to have been punished—that were once imposed by English Gypsies. To cut off an ear or the nose, even to slit the nose and take a piece out of each ear, to scar the cheeks—these are not light punishments. They would not have been applied in any but a race of the highest moral standard, but that they were applied is sufficient evidence that once at least delinquency was sufficiently frequent to require drastic measures for its suppression. How long since these drastic punishments have been inflicted in England I do not know, but they are known to many elderly Gypsies to-day as the traditional punishments of their people. And one old man, whom I met some twenty years ago, remembered a woman in his family who had actually had her nose slit. But old Gypsies are sometimes apt to confuse experience and tradition, and I was not sure that he had himself seen her. The tying of erring wives to a cart-wheel or a stake and thrashing them with a horse-whip (the woman being naked), the tying-up naked in an exposed place, the shearing of hair, these punishments for infidelity have been inflicted quite recently. Amos Churen had seen the thrashing of an erring wife when he was a young man, and told me that one of the Patemans had shaved his wife's head and forced her to wear no covering either to her head or body for two days when, on his return from Germany where he had been a prisoner for three years, he found that she had been unfaithful. But the sum total of all this only proves that in a race with exceptionally high moral standards severe penalties were exacted for infidelity in wives : it does not prove that there was a generally low moral standard in married women. I think it probable that the standard is lower to-day than it

was in the days of punishment because of the infusion of a fair amount of gorgio blood, but I must stress again that I have no evidence to support this and no modern *rai* who has actually travelled with Gypsies of recent years even suggests that it is so.

Undoubtedly the early age at which English Gypsy girls, in common with other oriental races, have married in the past helped in maintaining the high level of pre-nuptial chastity. Marriages at twelve, thirteen, fourteen and fifteen were once common. The average age at which the girls now marry is, of course, appreciably higher. Marriages at sixteen still occur, but nowadays that is regarded as rather young, and, generally speaking, girls marry at nineteen or twenty and men at a year or two older. It is very uncommon to find a man or a woman unmarried at thirty, though in one or two families there seems of recent years to have developed a strong disinclination to marry at all. Marriage at a very early age does still occur, though I do not know how frequently. A few years ago I came across a young woman of twenty-one with five children. She had been married when she was thirteen and was very happy with her husband, who was ten years older and obviously adored her. Indeed I have not seen a more contented, and yet vital, looking woman.

Another factor in the maintenance of pre-nuptial chastity is undoubtedly the extreme brevity and astonishing restraint of the Gypsy courtship. Thompson records an instance in which the couple had not been out together and had not kissed each other before marriage, and says that this was told him not as an extraordinary occurrence but as an illustration of the customary courtship in that family. I have never myself come across anything quite so restrained, but I do know more than one couple who had not been out by themselves before they married. And there are any number of recorded instances of restraint in courtship, so much so indeed that the ordinary uninitiated gorgio might be forgiven for wondering how on earth man and maid even manage to communicate their desire to

each other. Signs played a big part in Gypsy courtship until comparatively recent times, and though many of them seemed to have died out completely some remain even in these outspoken days. The coloured handkerchief, for example, is still used. It is given, to-day as formerly, by the man to the girl of his choice, who will not wear it unless she is willing to marry him. But for the most part nowadays these matters are arranged by word of mouth. There is no recognised engagement or betrothal period among English Gypsies. Most of the old authorities suggest that there was (though it is noticeable that Crabb does not) and some even go so far as to suggest that it was two years. If that was ever so, and I doubt it, it most certainly is not so now and has not been so for many years. In a few families it was the custom to pledge the lovers as a preliminary to marriage, but I do not think this ever carried any importance. In some families, however, it was the custom to test the suitor, and this presumably was a matter of importance, but it does not seem to have been a widespread custom at any time. The testing differed—in some families it consisted of making the suitor fight one or more of the girl's menfolk, in others it consisted of stealing a horse or a sheep. The latter method was also applied by some families to eloping bridegrooms. Usually it was a horse that had to be stolen and there does not appear to have been any time limit, but an Ingram in Co. Antrim told me that a sheep was chosen in his case.

Most Gypsies' marriages are elopements. It is customary for the suitor to ask the girl's father for the hand of his daughter in marriage, and it is customary for the father to refuse. The young couple then elope, but in due course they come back again and are accepted, sometimes after a pretended fuss, sometimes at once. And this brings me to the vexed question of the Gypsy marriage ceremony, about which reams have been written.

The popular idea is that Gypsies marry by jumping over a broomstick in the presence of their families. That, so many people and particularly novelists have maintained,

is the traditional ceremony. Undoubtedly it is a marriage ceremony, but it is only one of many, and in origin it is, I believe, tinker and not Romani at all. It came to England, in my opinion, from Ireland *via* Scotland. In Ireland it was, and is, called "jumping the budget," and tinkers are married "over the budget," which is the name of the box in which tinkers keep their tools. One modern Irish novelist, Maurice Walsh, has, in his *The Road to Nowhere*, given a few refinements to the performance by placing lighted candles on the box, but I have never heard of this being done in real life. One of my best friends was married "over the budget" in Co. Clare, and he said the ceremony was simplicity itself. He and his wife-to-be held hands, jumped the box, and that was that—though it must be done before witnesses from both families.

Jumping the broomstick is the Gypsy version of this ceremony. So much is obvious. But whereas "jumping the budget" does appear to be the traditional tinker ceremony, a good deal of doubt attaches to the Gypsy practice. Crabb does not mention it, and Crabb knew the Gypsies of the New Forest pretty well. On the other hand, *diddikais* in the New Forest some fifty years or so ago (that is considerably later than Crabb's day) undoubtedly did jump the broomstick as a wedding ceremony, but Harry Lee stoutly denied that true New Forest Gypsies ever did so. In Wales, however, pure-blooded Gypsies certainly jumped a besom made from flowering bloom until quite recently, and perhaps, here and there, individuals still do so. In view of their long seclusion, it is to be expected that Welsh Gypsies would have rather different rites, and in view of the fact that they have preserved their language so very much better than Gypsies elsewhere in Britain, it might be expected that they would also preserve some at least of the ancient customs and traditions. There is no evidence to suggest that jumping the besom was one of them. It was not, so far as I can discover, ever the whole of the ceremony, nor was it essential to jump over a besom made from



flowering broom ; a plain pole was used on occasions. It seems to me probable that they copied the practice from the travelling Irish already in Wales, and that there were evolved and practised by individuals elaborations (the flowering broom evidently has roots in a fertility cult) that were not accepted by the Welsh Gypsies as a whole. So far as English Gypsies are concerned, Morwood appears to be the only authority to describe a broomstick wedding. He witnessed one in Yorkshire, and his account rings true in every respect. We have no other eye-witness account. Plenty of Gypsies speak of marriage over the broomstick, and it is very difficult to say just when they are speaking metaphorically or not. It is a phrase used by some to indicate that they were not married in a church or a registry office, but it is possible that some of them do mean that they were actually married in that way. If the New Forest *diddikais* were (and I have no doubt about that), it is at least possible that some pure-blooded Gypsies were also. But I am sceptical, for there is no doubt at all that many Gypsies have staged "faked" weddings over the broomstick as an additional way of getting money out of the gorgios, and I cannot imagine the Romani, however tough, deliberately prostituting his proper wedding ceremony for the amusement of the gorgios. I can imagine him benefiting by the adoption of another's ceremony and deriving much amusement as well as profit from so doing.

The marriage rite that has been most widely practised among English Gypsies is the simplest imaginable—the mere joining of hands in the presence of witnesses. Its validity has been upheld in the English courts. As this is the custom in Germany (where a legend of broomstick marriages in the past also exists), in Hungary and elsewhere, it seems possible that it is the ancient rite or the remains of it. Simple enough in itself, there has been attached to it at one time or another, and varying from family to family, many interesting and sometimes complex customs.

Amos Churen was married "by de liddle stream" near Rhayader. "We joined hands and promised ourselves afore our own people." That done, Sarah (the bride) took a bucket and went down to the stream and filled it and brought it to her husband. And he took a cup and filled it and then they both drank from the cup. That was an additional pledge. "Yer didn't never drink from de same cup else." And then the cup was broken. "It were allus done so among our people." With that the ceremony ended. But Amos and Sarah, though man and wife, did not immediately live as man and wife. Sarah returned to the tents of her people for that night, and the next morning she and Amos went away by themselves for three days. That marriage took place in or about 1876. Amos always maintained that the carrying of water, the drinking from the cup, and the breaking of the cup were the proper practices at a true Gypsy wedding, but he did not seem to have any definite ideas about Sarah's return for one night to her people. He did not seem to think it was a Gypsy custom, and I gathered that he had never heard of anyone else doing so, but he was always a bit vague about this episode : not vague as to its happening, nor ashamed of its happening, but vague and, I think, a little uneasy when asked questions about it. It may have been that the young couple could not for some reason move from the camp that day (though I can see no good reason why two young Gypsies should be unable to move), for Amos was always very definite that newly married couples must leave the camp for a few days.

David Burton's marriage was rather different. It took place in or about 1878 and consisted also of joining hands and pledging each other in the presence of witnesses. But after that things were different. There was a loaf of bread, and this was broken in two. A drop of his blood and a drop of hers (obtained by the prick of a thorn in the thumb) was dropped on each half, and then each ate the little piece covered by the blood of the other. This was the additional pledge similar to the drinking from the same

cup that distinguished Amos Churen's marriage. And there was another similarity in that, as in that ceremony the cup was then broken, so in this the remaining bread was broken over the heads of the couple. After that David and his wife left, but returned the next day to take part in the rest of the festivities. I do not know how long these lasted, for David had forgotten. "Dey was *motto* (drunk) *pal*. Alayin' on de ground helpless dey was, ah, bloody helpless dey was."

Amos Churen was married in Wales in 1876. David Burton was married near Bentley, on the borders of Surrey and Hampshire, two years later. Amos had never heard of the breaking of bread as part of a Gypsy marriage ceremony—he regarded it as one of "dem *ratvali gorgio* ways"—though the drawing and mixing of blood evidently did not seem foreign to him. David Burton had never heard of the drawing of water by the bride, and he regarded the drinking from the same cup as no more than a pledge between sweethearts. Yet there is no doubt that the drawing of water was once practised fairly well by English Gypsies (though it was never a common practice), while the drawing of blood in connection with bread and flour has been practised by a number of Romani families. It seemed to me that both are offshoots or remnants of what was once a much more complex ceremony, and I think this is supported by the number of different customs connected with the marriage ceremony that have been recorded for families in different parts of Britain, customs which are one and all based on the same idea and differ only in detail. Furthermore, many of them are to be found in only slightly different form among Continental Gypsies.

There are one or two records of English Gypsy couples drawing their blood and mixing it with flour which is afterwards baked into a cake, and Thompson records one case in which bride and bridegroom drank each other's blood from a cup. There are not many records of this "blood" ceremony, and it might therefore be supposed that it was uncommon and practised by only a few families.

But I am not so sure about that, for no Gypsy that I have talked to about it has ever seemed surprised at the idea, although Burton was the only one who had practised it or had definite knowledge of it. And it is worth pointing out that among certain Indian tribes it is the custom for the bride and bridegroom to eat food in which their blood has been mixed.

There are rather more records for the mixing of flour—the use of a loaf is no more than a refinement of this—among British Gypsies at the marriage ceremony ranging from the elaborate procedure described by Simson as being in use formerly by the Scottish Gypsies to the simple stirring of flour in a bowl or the simple breaking of bread or cake over the heads of the bridal pair. This latter practice has many forms in English folk-lore—the cutting of the cake by the bride at a modern wedding is a degenerate remnant of it—and it might be thought that it had been borrowed by the English Gypsy from the English peasant, if it were not for the fact that it is in use to this day among various Continental Gypsies. More probably it is the remnant of some ancient earth and fecundity rite that has crept into the peasant-lore of many countries—and so been acquired by the Gypsies. Of the vast elaboration of the Scottish Gypsies—the use of wine in the flour and of a ram's horn to stir it—nothing now remains, but the horns of a ram still seem to be regarded with some reverence by the Gypsies of the Basque country, though I have no evidence that they are ever used.

In Germany I have seen bread broken at a marriage ceremony in just the way that was described to me by David Burton as having occurred at his wedding. But blood was not used at any time during this wedding as far as I could tell. Salt was sprinkled liberally on the two halves of the loaf and then these were broken over the heads of the bridal couple. In Austria I have seen blood used. The couple in this case were married in church, and feasting took place afterwards at the village inn. The bride smeared blood from her finger on the cheeks of her

groom, and he in turn smeared blood from his finger on her feet. In Denmark, nearly twenty years ago, I saw bride and bridegroom mix the flour in a bowl. The mixture was baked, and when this had been done the couple came before the headman of the tribe (he had travelled almost all over the world and spoke excellent English) and the cake was handed to him. He said a few words to them, which I could not hear, and then they joined hands and turned to face each other, standing very closely together. The old man lifted up the cake and broke it over their heads. The bridegroom kissed his bride, and the wedding was over. Something very similar I have no doubt happened at the wedding of David Burton and Emmy White all those years ago in a glade in an English wood.

Nowadays the majority of English Gypsies get married in church or in a registry office. Gypsies always adopt many of the customs of the land in which they sojourn, and among these customs is that of the dominant religion. It is, too, nowadays convenient to have things properly done from the point of view of registration and so forth. I am not suggesting that the adoption by English Gypsies of that form of Christianity prescribed by the Church of England is absolutely insincere. Religion, as a matter of fact, scarcely enters into the matter—I have seen very few signs of its forms being practised (except in the case of one Roman Catholic family) and I can just imagine the stir that the arrival of a Gypsy family in most churches would occasion. And I am quite certain that the increase of marriages “recordin’ to law” has not in any way altered the normal Gypsy view of marriage.

Church marriages have occurred among Gypsies for many years. It is by no means a new departure. But it has increased greatly of recent years—there has been an even greater increase of marriages before a registrar—and presumably therefore a decrease in the old practices. But I am not sure about that; I think most Gypsies, except those that have become excessively genteel, still cling in one way or another to some old Romani way.

Just before the outbreak of war a young Gypsy travelling the New Forest district with a wife of only a few days' standing told me that they had been married by a registrar "recordin' to law." "But it's what we say to each other that matters, sir, now ain't it?"

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V

## DEATH AND BURIAL

ON April 17th, 1926, there was buried at Crediton, Devonshire, Mrs. Caroline Penfold (the name should be Pinfold, but has been corrupted), a Gypsy. After the burial the living-waggon in which she died, together with all her personal belongings that could be burned, were reduced to ashes, all her crockery was smashed and buried, and all her jewellery, with the exception of one heavy gold ring, was also buried.

Though the burning of the belongings of the deceased is the best known and most characteristic of all English Gypsy funeral rites (and I shall return to the funeral of Caroline Penfold, which was remarkable in many ways) it is by no means the only one. There are, as is to be expected, a considerable number of customs connected with the death and burial of English Gypsies. Moreover, though not all of them are observed now, and though there is a considerable variation as between family and family, many more of them are still observed than is the case with other customs and taboos, and as they are from their very nature more noticeable and so more easily recorded than the customs and taboos connected with birth, marriage, uncleanness and so forth, we have a considerable amount of material concerning them. There are very few published accounts of Gypsy weddings, for example, but there are quite a number of accounts, in books and newspapers, of Gypsy funerals. For, curiously enough, though few Gypsies in the past took the trouble to get married in church, or indeed thought it necessary, the vast majority insisted on Christian burial.

There are, of course, many stories of Gypsy burials in unsanctified ground. For example, there is supposed to be a Gypsy burial ground at Strethall in Essex, which in times past was used by the Shaws, East Anglian Grays and

Dymocks, which last is not a Gypsy name. This story has been investigated by Thompson and others, and they have found nothing to support it. The Shaws profess no knowledge of it (and Gypsies do not mind admitting past burials in unsanctified ground) and nobody in the parish at the time enquiries were made could recall it. All the same there were mounds in that field, and skeletons were dug up. Some people at some time were buried there, but that is no proof that they were Gypsies. Again, there are places in Buckinghamshire where Gypsies are supposed to be buried. At Quainton, near Fenny Stratford, at Mursley and in Towersey Field. There is a possibility that those at Quainton and Mursley are genuine ; there seems to be no evidence to support the others. These are only a few examples. It would be possible, I imagine, to duplicate them for almost every county in England. But, as Lias Boswell said to Thompson, "there's no compass to the lies gorgios 'll make up about *Romanichals*."

Naturally there is very little evidence of unofficial burial, and such as there is is indirect. It seems to have been confined within recorded time at least, mainly to the Herons, the East Anglian Smiths, the northern Youngs and to some of the families connected with them by marriage. It is best substantiated for the Herons. Remarkably few records of the interments of Herons occur in the old parish registers, only one between the years 1650 and 1830—that being of "Mrs. Hearn a Gypsey Queene" at Stanbridge, Bedfordshire, in 1691. And, as Thompson points out, she may not have belonged to the family by birth nor have adhered to it after her marriage: "Whilst 'his majesty's' failure to provide a shroud or winding sheet of woollen cloth, in consequence of which he was distrained upon, 'but no distress to be found,' may imply that he possessed so little experience of ordinary burials as to be ignorant of a law relating to them already twelve years old." The very fact that interments of Herons do not appear in parish registers, coupled with the tradition of unsanctified burial current in the family, is proof enough of such



burial ; and additional weight is lent to this when we find in the same period of 180 years no fewer than eight records of Herons marrying in church. While in conversation with Thompson modern Gypsies of Heron blood have been very definite about it. Kadilia Brown, a Heron in the male line, would not hear of Christian sepulture among her ancestors. “ ‘ Bury in churchyards ! ’ she exclaimed. ‘ Not they ! They was too *a-trash* (frightened) to go nigh them. No : they’d just dig a grave thersel’s, and bury the poor things there where they died, on some bit o’ common, or down an owld lane.’ ” Her cousins, Katie Smith and Adelaide Lee, were equally sure about it. “ It was kept secret, they declared, sometimes from relatives, even, until after the body had been disposed of, as quickly as might be, in a ditch, or on some little frequented heath ; and again fear, this time of strangers handling the corpse, was given as the motive.” Then Genti Gray, a granddaughter in the female line of “ No Name ” Heron, assured him that several of her mother’s kin were buried “ up there on the Mussel,” meaning Mousehold Heath near Norwich. In fact, it may be taken as certain that Herons, Grays, Youngs and Smiths did bury their dead in unsanctified ground. Why they did is another matter. I cannot accept the reason that they were frightened to go near churchyards, since they were not frightened of going to church to get married. Nor can I accept the idea that they were afraid of the gorgios handling the body, since it is the common Gypsy practice to get them to lay out the body, and, in fact, Gypsies show a strong disinclination to handle the dead at all. It seems to me much more probable that it was the ancient custom to bury the dead where they died, by the roadside or on some unfrequented heath, and that the custom took longer to die in the notoriously diehard Heron family. Personally, I think that the occasional preference expressed even to-day by Gypsies (and expressed much more frequently a few years ago) that they should be buried as close to the hedgerow of a churchyard as possible, and the desire still quite frequently expressed that

a thorn bush should be planted on the grave, is also a relic of wayside burial.

Naturally we have no record of any ceremony or other custom connected with these burials by the wayside. The impression given by the descendants of the Heron family who discussed the matter with Thompson is that they were hurried and secretive affairs. But I find this hard to believe in view of the fact that there are to-day so many customs observed, most of which have nothing to do with Christian burial and which must have their roots deep in the past, and also because, in one case at least (I have an idea that Blackwater in Hampshire might be another), the burial place is so well known. If these wayside burials were hurried hole-in-corner affairs scattered up and down the country one would hardly expect them to be remembered. But Mousehold Heath is remembered. More than one Heron lies buried there "in a hollow screened by gorse, on that part of the heath farthest from the barracks," as Fred Gray told Thompson. The very fact that more than one lies buried in the same spot (and Genti Gray said "several") indicates a return to the place for the particular business of burial, and that in itself indicates some sort of ceremony, some customs attached to the actual act of interment. But if we have no knowledge of what occurred at these wayside burials, nor yet of what occurred before them, we have a considerable amount of material connected with Christian burial.

It appears to be the custom in many families for the body to lie awhile "in state" so that it may be viewed by relatives and friends. There are several records of this for the Boswell family, who did not apparently mind the gorgios viewing their dead. In each instance the coffin was left open until it was nearly time for the procession to start for the graveyard, as is often done at gorgio funerals, so that mourners from a distance might see the body. When Urania Buckland died at Reading in 1912 a similar proceeding was adopted, and when Thomas Pinfold died in Cornwall in the same year the coffin was taken out of the

van an hour before the time fixed for the interment and laid on the grass with the lid off for friends to view the body. Many other examples could be given of this practice, and Thompson also mentions that the body of a Gypsy woman who died at Littlebury in Essex about 1830 is said to have been laid on trestles by the encampment whilst awaiting burial, a procedure that appears to be unique. Against these examples Thompson lists some in which a sight of the body has been refused even to relations. "When Lawrence Boswell's eldest son, Moses, died at Etwall, near Derby, in 1855, his widow, Trēnit Heron, excluded visitors from the 'death tent,' and even refused to allow relations to view the body. The East Anglian Smiths and Browns, the latter being Herons under an assumed name, secreted their dead in the same manner, according to Katie Smith, a granddaughter of 'Jasper Petulengro' and her cousin, Kadilia Brown; and similar behaviour has been noticed recently by O'Connor Boswell's family (who are descended from Major in the male line, and a succession of gorgios in the female) among relics of the Ambrose Smith-John Chilcott 'clan' settled at Green Lane, Birkenhead. The colony there consists of Lurēni and Lenda Young, daughters of Trēnit Heron's brother, Taiso, and of Shūri Chilcott, together with their children and grandchildren, who bear the names Boswell, Smith and Robinson; and one of the Robinsons is married to a son of O'Connor's. Yet, despite this connecting link, the latter's wife, Angelina Finney, declares that she and her family have twice been denied a sight of their dead. 'And we're not the only ones,' she said, 'for ther's some as is more nearer to 'em nor what we are bin served the same, though they've gone a-purpose to take a last look.' " The fact that Angelina Finney complains, and evidently feels bitter about it, is sufficient to show that it is not the usual custom. I have not personally come across a single instance of refusal. At Caroline Penfold's funeral, where things were carried through with a most punctilious regard for custom, and at Helen Shevlin's funeral (and Helen had

the true black blood of the Ingrams in her veins) the body was exposed to view.

Most bereaved Gypsies fast while their dead lie unburied. In one family of Boswells there is a definite taboo against the eating of "red" meat at such a time and this taboo remained in force until the camping place had been deserted. This family also abstained from preparing meals of any sort, and normally declined any cooked food offered them. The East Anglian Smiths and Browns, according to Thompson, neither cooked nor ate cooked food, contenting themselves as a rule with bread and water, and Būi Boswell and his many daughters neither ate nor smoked, and drank only water, whilst his wife, Savaina Lovell, was awaiting burial. The same practice has been recorded for Herons and Grays and Smiths, Lees and Lovells and Loveridges, Bucklands and Burtons, Stanleys and Coopers. I have known it in Ayres, Lees, Deightons, Pinfolds—indeed I have not yet come across any family in which this custom of fasting until the time of burial is not observed. Normally fasting ends with the return of the mourners from the graveside, and then sometimes a special meal is served. Thompson records that this happened after the burial of Thomas Pinfold in 1912, when "tables placed on the moor were laden with provisions and wine." This must be a very rare occurrence indeed—and is obviously an imitation of a common gorgio custom—for Thompson gives only the one occasion. I have not myself ever come across it. Children are not expected to share the fast, so far as I know, in any family, and Thompson bears this out. All the same, while an Ayres was awaiting burial a year or so ago his grandchildren, aged fourteen, twelve and eleven, fasted as rigorously as their parents.

Frequently while the body is awaiting burial it is watched over by relatives. This "vigil" is a very old established custom among Gypsies. Thompson was told by aged members of the Derby gypsery that Vashti Carlin's body (Vashti was a Boswell who married a gorgio, persuading him to travel) was watched continually by two

kinswomen from the time of death until burial and that her body was illuminated the while by candles at her head and feet. Vashti was buried on April 10th, 1839. Thompson then records similar vigils for Mary Buckland in 1909, when her two surviving sisters sat by the corpse without sleep until it was removed for burial, and for the wife of Ōni Lee some ten years earlier, when her sister and a daughter performed the same feat. Giving examples of vigils during which the watchers were changed, he instances the death of Abraham Buckland at Cowley near Oxford in 1923, and quotes from Frank Cuttriss's account in *Romany Life* of a New Forest vigil. Cuttriss says: "The coffin was placed in a tent a short distance from the rest of the camp, by its side stood a tiny clock . . . the little chamber being lit by a lantern suspended from one of the tent rods. Two were keeping watch until midnight when they would arouse two others to take their places until dawn." Cuttriss does not give the name of the dead person, but I am pretty sure he was writing of the death of Sarah Churen in 1912. His reference to a lantern is interesting, because the usual illumination is by candles, or more commonly I think by one candle at the head, and I know that a lantern was used at the death of Sarah Churen. As a rule these illuminations continue day and night, but in some cases, as at the death of Abraham Buckland, they are lit only at night, which is a departure from normal Christian practice. Another interesting point in Cuttriss's account is the mention of the tent at a little distance from the rest of the camp. The erection of a death-tent is not usual among English Gypsies. As a general rule the body is left where death occurred, in the van or tent, and removed only when the procession to the grave is due to start. The laying of Thomas Pinfold's coffin on the grass, so that people might view the body, is an exception to this, and Thompson records an instance in 1811 when a tent was erected over the coffin of a Boswell who died in Birmingham, an instance which he regards as altogether exceptional. Cuttriss's example was not, however, exceptional for New

Forest Gypsies, nor did he regard it as such. I have not heard of a case recently, but it was certainly the common practice among the *poorer* New Forest Gypsies until quite recently and, a little further back, among those of purer blood. As soon as death had taken place the body was removed from the tent, or van, carried to a little distance from the camp, laid upon a board or folded blankets, and an old tent or a rough, but rainproof, makeshift put up over it. After the burial (and a light was kept burning until the burial was over) this tent and its contents were burnt. There were, I think, two reasons for this departure from the normal practice : a desire to remove the dead body from the camp as some precaution against the return of the spirit (all Gypsies are mortally afraid of ghosts : but more of that later) and common or garden thrift, the desire not to destroy more than absolutely necessary.

The keeping of formal vigils is not confined to Gypsies, of course. I have known it to occur among Hampshire peasantry ; in fact, it occurred as recently as 1940 near Winchester, when, by the way, a single candle was kept alight at the head of the corpse. It occurs among Irish tinkers, according to James Arigho, who maintains that the "wake" has never been a tinker custom. It occurs among the northern potters who have a faint Gypsy strain in them. These northern potters do not feast and drink in the presence of the dead as was once the custom among north-country or Scottish Gypsies, according to Simson, and Thompson records that there was no feasting at the death of George Miller, a potter, in 1909, although there was no fasting. Scottish Gypsies had very different customs from those in use among English Gypsies, and while they may well have infected the Gypsies of the north country I find it hard to believe in view of the contacts the latter undoubtedly had with strict English families. The feasting among north-country Gypsies must, I think, have been among tinkers strayed over the border. Vigils also are kept among the Welsh Gypsies, and Thompson quotes from a letter written to him by a Mr. Alfred Jones from Llanelly

in 1912 : " Gypsies about here do not go to bed until after the funeral. They sit in company round the fire, and now and then fall back dozing, but at least three must keep awake. If there were only two, one of them might drop off to sleep, and that would leave one by himself. Afraid of the ghost, they said ; that is why they sit in company and lie around the fire." The keeping of vigils is, nowadays, less common and seems to be commonest among south-country Gypsies and particularly amongst those in the New Forest.

I have said that Gypsies have a strong aversion to handling a corpse and that the laying out is almost invariably done by gorgios. One might as well say " invariably," for Thompson, in all the long and careful research he has done into Gypsy death and burial customs, has come across only one instance of a Gypsy assisting at the laying out of a corpse. This aversion to handling the body is sometimes accompanied by a strong objection to anyone else doing so. Sometimes on these occasions the normal preparations are very much curtailed. Thompson cites as examples two comparatively recent deaths at Birkenhead. Both were youngish men and both died fully, even carefully, dressed, though both had been ill for a considerable period. The only attention either received subsequently was to have his eyes and mouth closed, and his face sponged over very lightly and rapidly by his mother. " On each occasion the body was then laid on a strip of carpet at the back of the tent, and covered with a white sheet. The undertakers were not allowed to make any measurements, and when they brought the coffin their instructions were to lift the corpse into it by taking hold of the carpet only." A similar procedure is said to have been followed in the case of earlier deaths at Birkenhead, notably in the case of Ambrose Smith's sister, Elizabeth, in 1883.

This custom of the Ambrose Smith family may be regarded as rather extreme, but the practice of dressing up for death was formerly quite common and I have known it to occur as recently as 1930 or thereabouts.

When Louis Boswell was buried on January 26th, 1839, he was fully dressed and shod in buckle shoes. In his pockets were his watch, his pocket-knife and some money, beside him lay his walking-stick, his silver tankard and, perhaps, his fiddle. When his daughter Vashti was buried later in the same year she, too, was fully dressed and had on her buckle shoes. Round her waist was a broad belt ornamented with silver, and having concealed pockets in which money had been placed. There are other records of Gypsies being buried in shoes, notably Absolom Smith, who was buried at Twyford in Leicestershire in 1826 wearing shoes adorned with silver buckles each of which weighed half-a-pound. But the custom of being buried in shoes seems to have been confined in the main to the midlands. Thompson only gives two examples outside the midlands, and says some Gypsies, including a Gray, a Heron and a Lee, have informed him that it is contrary to Gypsy custom. Dressing up, however, is certainly not. It has been a common practice not only in England, but in Germany and throughout Eastern Europe. In England and Germany best clothes are worn, but they are always clothes that have been worn before. In Eastern Europe there seems to be a preference for new clothes. Covering the head does not seem ever to have been a common practice among English Gypsies. Eliza Heron was buried in Norfolk about 1887 in a scarlet bonnet, and this seems to be a unique record. There are two records of midland Gypsy women being buried with kerchiefs arranged in the usual manner on their heads. There is one similar record for a Norfolk Gypsy, Tom Brown, and Eliza Boss was buried with the hood of her cloak turned up. The practice seems to have been more prevalent among Scottish Gypsies, who were otherwise buried naked more often than not. Simson says that a paper cap was used and that paper was also put round the feet of the body. Otherwise the body was naked except that on the breast, opposite the heart, a small circle of red and blue ribbons was placed.



Burying a corpse naked is unknown among English Gypsies, and so is the use of paper or of ribbons of any colour to adorn the body. But the circle on the breast idea is not unknown, for instead of ribbons some English Gypsies have used, and perhaps still do, a round sod of turf. The exact purpose of this custom is not known. I find it impossible to take seriously the Smiths' explanation (the custom was commonest among Smiths), as quoted by Thompson, that it was to prevent swelling. It is, in any case, not entirely a Gypsy custom. It was formerly common among the peasantry of the lakeland counties, in Staffordshire, in Cornwall, and even occurred occasionally in Hampshire. It was known and practised by the northern potters. And related customs—the use of a few tufts of grass (which would certainly do nothing to prevent swelling) by midland Gypsies, of grasses or flowers by southern Gypsies, and of a pebble by Irish tinkers—are many. It is curious to find no explanation in all the pages of *Folk-Lore* (if there is one I have missed it) and even Fraser is unhelpful. The same reason—prevention of swelling—has often been given for the placing of a saucer of salt on the breast. This is a generally accepted survival of saining; so it looks, as Thompson points out, as if the motives that once prompted the adoption of these rites had been forgotten or had become confused.

If dressing-up for death was at one time a fairly common practice among English Gypsies, the burying of possessions including clothes with the dead was very much more common and is not yet extinct, nor, in fact, does it show any signs of becoming extinct. And this is the reason why many Gypsies' coffins are so exceptionally large. There is nothing else out of the way about Gypsy coffins. In my experience they are always very good and solidly made and the inscriptions short, plain and neat. Clothes are the most usual possessions buried with the dead. Thompson gives a fairly full list of well-known burials of this type. Her entire wardrobe was buried with Ethelenda Heron, the greater part of Santinia Smith's with her: Isaac

Heron was buried with a suit and an overcoat, Savaina Lovell with one or two dresses, a silk shawl, and other "bits o' finery." All these Gypsies were buried only in undergarments and a shroud. It was probably less usual to bury additional clothes with a fully-dressed corpse, but it undoubtedly did occur, and Thompson, who gives two examples, thinks that it would be easy to obtain many more and that it may once have been customary to do so. On the other hand, the East Anglian Smiths, who normally buried their dead fully dressed, regarded any loose enclosures in the coffin with disfavour, though one of this family, Elizabeth, was buried with two Brussels carpets, one a "large one" as well as the strip upon which she was laid out. The clothes very rarely include boots or shoes. Boots were placed in the coffins of Thomas Penfold and Supplista Smith, but this is most unusual, and I think the inclusion of a pair of new boots in Job Cooper's coffin, as mentioned by Leland, must be a mistake on the part of that great *rai*. There is no other record of a similar occurrence among English Gypsies, and it is absolutely contrary to accepted English Gypsy practice, though it has occurred among foreign Gypsies in England as recently as 1936. Indeed there is a strong aversion to unworn clothes belonging to the dead, and Thompson mentions that when Theophilus Boswell was buried his large coffin was almost filled up with clothes, but a new suit which had just come for him from the tailor was left out, and subsequently cut up and sent to a rag-shop.

The clothes buried with a corpse are sometimes turned inside out. There are not many recorded instances of this among English Gypsies, but for all that I think this custom was once fairly widespread, and it is not dead even to-day. The three best known examples are all for members of the Heron family who died within a year or so of each other—Isaac Heron, his niece Amelia Heron, the wife of Elias Gray, and her niece Ethelenda Heron. Isaac and Amelia died in the midlands, Ethelenda in South Wales, and in each case the clothes were folded inside out and laid

beneath the body. According to Thompson, these are the only three records of this practice in England, but he mentioned related practices in the coat of a fully dressed corpse being turned inside out and of bodies being buried clad in underclothes turned inside out, both being practices regarded as normal by his informants. I can add one further example of clothes being folded inside out and the corpse laid upon them—Caroline Penfold was buried thus. I know of no case of a fully dressed corpse having any of its clothes turned inside out, but I do know of two, and perhaps more, cases in which underclothes have been turned inside out. This at least seems to have been a widespread custom, for James Arigho maintains that the true tinkers were always buried so. The reversal of garments, so Thompson was informed, is a practice in Bulgarian mourning. I do not know about that, and cannot find confirmation anywhere, but the reversal of clothes is a well-known safeguard against ill-luck among many peoples. Thompson gives one or two examples, including one from a Gypsy tale. Among peasant peoples in England it is uncommon now, perhaps it was never common, but it does still occur and the remnants of it still linger among the educated classes. I have been told by highly educated people that it is good luck to put a sock on inside out, I have even been told that it is good luck to put on a jumper or pullover inside out. I have known a Hampshire farm labourer turn his jacket inside out before taking part in a ploughing match, and I have known Irish peasantry reverse their hats before any big event in which they particularly desire to be lucky. I think it not improbable that this reversal of clothing as a burial custom is no more than a desire to ensure that the corpse has a lucky journey to the next world, though it would be easy to produce much more complex reasons for it.

I think consideration of the journey that must be taken after death plays a large part in deciding the other articles that are frequently buried with a corpse. All sorts of things are buried, but jewellery and trinkets seem to be

the most usual. Occasionally a vast amount of material is buried with the deceased. Rodney Smith, the Evangelist, in his autobiography, *Gipsy Smith, his Life and Work*, says : "When an uncle of mine died my aunt bought a coffin large enough for all his possessions—including his fiddle, cup and saucer, plate, knife, etc.—except, of course, his waggon. My wife and my sister pleaded hard for the cup and saucer as a keepsake, but she was resolute. Nobody should ever use them again." Such wholesale methods are unusual, and, as a general rule, Gypsies destroy a dead person's crockery and table cutlery. There have been few exceptions to this rule, though a Constance Smith had a knife, fork and plate buried with her, and Mordecai Boswell a cup, plate, knife, fork and spoon, all carefully wrapped up in a "crumb cloth." His daughter Ambrozina, as Thompson records, remarking that "he'd likely have need of 'em."

These are, however, exceptions : jewellery and personal trinkets are not. Most Gypsy women wear rings, necklaces and ear-rings or ear-pendants, and these are often—probably even to-day more often than not—buried with them. Leland heard of Stanleys buried with rings on their fingers, and Thompson says that the Derby Boswells regard stripping a dead woman of her jewellery as both wicked and dangerous. In this family it was usual to place in the coffin with the body any trinkets that the deceased was not wearing at the time of her death, but in most families Thompson thinks it is probably more usual to break them up and either drop them into water or bury them in a hole. It is recorded that at Alice Barney's funeral, at Otterbourne in Hampshire in 1911, her jewellery was interred underneath the coffin, a practice intermediate between those commonly favoured. Actually the heavy gold ring that she was wearing at the time of her death was removed and is still being worn by a descendant. Alice Barney was buried, except for this, in the jewellery she was wearing, and all the rest, a considerable collection, was dropped into the grave just before the coffin was lowered. A point

I have not seen mentioned is that a golden sovereign was thrown on to the coffin before the grave was filled in. Watches are sometimes buried with the men, and so are all sorts of oddments that might conceivably be thought useful in after-life or on the journey, for example pocket-knives, walking-sticks, tankards (many old Gypsies carried drinking mugs in their tail pockets), tobacco boxes, and so forth. There is one record, at least, of a fiddle being buried and one of a whip. They were the things that the deceased used most frequently or was fondest of, but, curiously, I can find no record of a snuff-box being buried, and as I have seen some very old and exquisite snuff-boxes in the possession of Gypsies it would seem that these were always kept as mementoes.

Food, curiously enough, seems to have been buried with the dead only by Hampshire Gypsies. Thompson quotes a very curious record which he says was originally published by the Hampshire Field Club in 1922 of a Gypsy burial at Blackwater in 1912. (I cannot find any record of this in the Club's publications.) At this funeral there was placed in the coffin the deceased's best set of harness, some grain and some bread. The reason for this is evident enough. Harness and corn would be needed for his horse in the next world or *en route* to it, and bread would be needed for his own sustenance. Thompson very rightly casts doubt on this record. For one thing it is supposed to have taken place in Blackwater churchyard, but there is no church at either of the Blackwaters in Hampshire nor is there one at the Blackwater in the Isle of Wight. Again, the man is described as "a Gypsy king," and Thompson has no knowledge of anyone who could possibly be described as such dying at any of the three Blackwaters in or about 1912. The last objection is easily disposed of—all Gypsy men who die and achieve print in so doing are "kings," all Gypsy women who achieve print at their death are "queens" (even poor Caroline Penfold was "a Gypsy queen"). It means no more than that. The objection about the churchyard is more serious, at first sight indeed insur-

mountable. Since there are no churchyards at any of the Blackwaters the man could not possibly have been buried in one. But he might, I think, have been buried at Blackwater. As I have already said, I have wondered once or twice about one of the Blackwaters as a possible burial ground analogous to Mousehold Heath. The late date, 1912, makes an unsanctified burial very unlikely I admit, but——. I do not know anything more definite about this mysterious burial than this—that early in 1912 one Job Churen, almost the last of that mysterious and respected family, died, and that at his funeral his favourite horse (Thompson wondered about the horse and if one was slaughtered at the Blackwater funeral) was slaughtered. So much I have heard, but I do not know where Job Churen was buried. One more point : bread and grain are believed by many Gypsies to afford protection against ghosts, witches, evil luck generally, and even against the devil. Gypsies have been known to sew bread inside their horses' collars to safeguard the animals against "witching." Thompson states that Sandi Lovell used to clutch a loaf of bread to his naked breast whenever he was assailed by wandering spirits, and that Tom Lee crumbled a whole loaf around his tent when his son, Bendigo, was born. Furthermore, tales are not infrequently told by Gypsies of men and women who habitually carried wheat or other grain in their pockets as a measure of safety, or ran into cornfields when followed by the *beng* or a *mulo*. "The dear God's bread" and "the dear God's grain" are common expressions among old-fashioned Romanies. Amos Churen *always* carried some bread in his pocket. He set very great store by it. It was something much more than a talisman to him.

Money is frequently buried with the body. Leland, on the authority of one of the Deightons, says that £3,000 was buried with one of the Chilcotts, which is, I think, improbable. The sums are usually small. Twopence was buried with Zachariah Smith, "a copper or two" with Kenza Smith, a penny each with Supplista Smith, Noah Holland

and Thomas Penfold. Some of the Boswells were apparently buried with a pound or two, for the Derby branch of this family used to put in the coffin any money the deceased had about him when he died or had handled just before he died. The largest sum that I have knowledge of is the sovereign thrown on to the coffin of Alice Barney. The custom of burying money with the dead is not confined to Gypsies, of course. The Prussians used to put money in the coffin so that the deceased could buy refreshment on the way, and the custom is not yet dead in Germany and Austria, and I believe is still followed in parts of the Balkans. Thompson records that at the funeral of James Hedges, one of a half-blood family that travels chiefly in Essex, a friend dropped half-a-crown into the open grave, saying as he did so : " Here, Jimmy : here's something for a drink on the way." The old Irish tinkers used to drop a coin into the grave and, when the grave was filled in, spill some liquor on the soil.

The inclusion of a coin in the coffin was not unknown in gorgio funerals, particularly, it is said, among Roman Catholics, though it is generally strenuously denied by them. Some details of this may be found in *Notes and Queries* \* : " Cuthbert Bede," writing about the burial of a Roman Catholic lady of title not then very long dead, states that tenantry and others saw her in her coffin and, according to " two or three cottagers," a hammer rested in her right hand and a gold coin in her left : " with the hammer she was to knock at the gate of heaven, and with the coin to pay St. Peter for admittance." He discredits these statements and suggests that a crucifix and a reliquary were mistaken for the secular objects named. Then follows some correspondence during which one " C. B." thought that the " hammer " must have been a crucifix and suggested that the " coin " was a medal, perhaps granted by some religious order. He denied that it was a Roman Catholic practice to furnish the dead with a hammer and

\* 5th Series, Vol. XII (1879), pp. 148, 236, 478, and 6th Series, Vol. I (1880), p. 132.

a coin, but added : " I have heard of such equipments for a corpse spoken of among Montgomeryshire peasantry." Next comes R. H. Hampton Roberts, who said that once he had been told by some aged Welsh people of the burial with Roman Catholics of a candle to light the way, a loaf of bread for refreshment on the journey, a hammer to knock at the door of heaven and a coin to pay St. Peter for opening it. Lastly, J. W. Smith wrote to say that a similar story, with the addition sometimes of a billhook or hatchet to clear obstructions from the road, and a tinder-box, flint and steel to strike a light, was current in Essex. He declared this to be an absurd Protestant idea arising from ignorance of Roman Catholic usages. If so, as Thompson points out, it is odd that an Irish Roman Catholic of the late Mr. Hall's acquaintance should have told him that he had witnessed the putting of a hammer, a candle and one or two pennies into the coffin at gorgio funerals and for the purposes mentioned, even supposing he did not imply priestly sanctions or tolerance of the practice.

Both candles and hammers have been placed in Gypsy coffins. I know of no recent inclusions of candles, but a hammer was placed in the coffin of Caroline Penfold in 1926, and there are records of this as far back as 1864. Whether it is Gypsy custom that was copied by some gorgios or *vice versa* is a nice point. Myself, I incline to the latter view.

There does not seem to be any special order about Gypsy funeral processions nor any unusual feature common to all, nor is there any evidence that there was in the past. The majority of Gypsy funeral processions are, as processions, perfectly ordinary, but a few have odd and outstanding features and some of these are worth recording. For example, when Dinah Boswell was taken to her grave at Newington Butts in 1773 chimney sweepers' boys were substituted for plumes on the hearse. When Charles Organ was taken to the cemetery at Newport, Monmouthshire, in 1912 the mourners wore horseshoes for luck and, refusing



to ride in the vehicles provided, walked behind the body. Thompson records that at the funeral of an unknown Gypsy at Winterton, Lincolnshire—perhaps as recently as the middle of the nineteenth century—the hearse is said to have been drawn by a pair of donkeys with their inside ears cut off. This information was given him by the late Mr. Hall, whose son heard of it from a native of Winterton. (I think this must be a legendary tale of some long distant Gypsy funeral, based as most legends are on a thin foundation of fact, for when I was a boy and beginning to show an interest in Gypsies I was told by an old fisherman that their coffins were drawn to the graveyard by donkeys with their ears cut off.) When William West died at Oswaldtwistle in 1913 his body was taken by road to Astley Bridge near Bolton where he was buried in the family vault. For this purpose a team of six Belgian horses was employed, and on one of the first pair a postilion dressed entirely in black was mounted. This procedure was followed fairly closely in two more modern funerals, and is perhaps the nearest we can get to the true Gypsy funeral procession.

The wearing of black by the mourners is now quite common among Gypsies, though it is by no means universal. White has been worn by maidens in funeral processions, but this is an adaptation of an English folk usage and is not a common Gypsy custom. Thompson gives several examples, including the funeral of Sinaminti Buckland. When she was buried a white sheet held by eight girls dressed in white was used instead of a pall, since she was considered “young and single” although she was the mother of at least three children. At one time red was favoured as a mourning colour by women, and the women of the Lawrence Boswell family, until quite recently, invariably wore red cloaks, though black or dark clothes, supplemented by mourning scarves and crepe hat bands with long streamers were customary for the men. At Aaron Boswell’s funeral, in the middle of the last century, all the little girls as well as the grown women wore red cloaks, and some were provided with new ones for the

occasion. At Sinaminti Buckland's funeral red cloaks were also worn, and many Gypsies have told Thompson that red was formerly the mourning colour for women, some maintaining that it used to be so for men as well. Louis Lovell was buried in a suit of red flannel and Eliza Heron in a red cloak and bonnet. Among south country Gypsies generally the wearing of some sort of red ornament—a rosette or ribbons—rather than the wearing of red clothes seems to have been more usual, and is not yet extinct—I have seen it within the last eighteen months. This has also been noticed in the north, for Thompson says that at the funeral of Muldobriar Heron, at Birch-in-Hopwood in the 'eighties, some of the male mourners had red ribbons in their button-holes or pinned to their coat lapels. It has been carried across the Atlantic, too, for when Matilda, the wife of Levi Stanley (who migrated to America about 1860) was buried at Dayton, Ohio, in 1878, "red was the predominant hue of her funeral trappings, each mourner wore a scrap of crimson and the hearse was decked with red plumes." The circle of red and blue ribbons placed on the deceased's breast by Scottish Gypsies is, I think, connected with this rite and also, in all probability, the painting of some Gypsy tombstones at Yatton red, white and blue. So, too, is the tying of red ribbons to the rose tree that was planted on the grave of Louis Boswell. Andree says that Gypsy visitors to the tomb of two of their race at Volkmarode in Brunswick tied red ribbons and pieces of rag to it, and Wittich, writing of south German Gypsies—an unpublished article quoted by Thompson—says that graves are adorned each year with red wool, plaited into ropes, and "hung crosswise from the grave cross," but Thompson says that the Louis Boswell incident is the only one known to have occurred among English Gypsies. This is not so, however, for although I have not personally come across any similar incident I have talked to an old woman (not a Gypsy) who remembered it being done at the grave of Gerania Lee at Otterbourne in Hampshire, and I have talked many times to the

Gypsy who did it year by year until the thorn tree that was planted in the grave grew too large and had to be cut down. Gerania was credited with more than one hundred years when she died (in point of fact she was forty-two) and she came from the midlands. A thorn tree was planted on the grave and a quickset hedge all round it, and to this tree on the anniversary of her death red ribbons were tied by relatives who came from the Nottingham district for some years after her death, and for many years after that by Amos Churen, who lived in the neighbourhood.

Death means a great deal to Gypsies and their expressions of grief are sometimes more unrestrained than our own. Gorgio accounts of Gypsy funerals rarely seem to agree, and very little reliance can be placed upon newspaper reports. Sometimes, as at the funeral of Urania Boswell at Farnborough, Kent, on April 28th, 1933, which was very widely reported, every account differs, so much so that it is difficult to believe that they refer to the same event. One newspaper described the mourners at this funeral as "a gay and happy throng," and went on to say that this was the Gypsy custom (another described them as "silent and respectful," another as "weeping aloud"), but I find it hard to believe that the mourners at any Gypsy funeral have been "a gay and happy throng," and it most certainly is not the Gypsy custom that they should be so. It is entirely contrary to everything I know about Gypsies and their ideas about death. It is also contrary to all the authoritative accounts of Gypsy interments. True, it was formerly the custom among Border and Scottish Gypsies to feast and drink in the presence of the dead, but this custom was certainly not prompted by joy, and in any case the fast, to which I have already referred, has always been the common practice.

Keening is not usual among English Gypsies as apparently it is among those of southern Germany, for Wittich says that among his people when a man dies it is the custom for all the bereaved except the widow to howl loudly. Crabb says that when James Smith was buried at Launton,

in Oxfordshire, in 1830, his widow "tore her hair, uttered the most frantic exclamations, and begged to be allowed to throw herself on the coffin that she might be buried with her husband." Charlotte Yonge, in *An Old Woman's Outlook*, says that the relatives of Gerania Lee, at her funeral at Otterbourne, "lamented her with loud cries like the Easterns." And after the burial of "Queen Grannie Jeffers" in the Stanley vault at Dayton, Ohio, in 1884, her sons and daughters climbed "down to the coffin to take their last farewell. Their sobs and cries filled the air, and were echoed by the mourners that stood on the brink of the grave . . . threw themselves prostrate on the coffin, kissing the hard wood, and it was only with great difficulty that they could be prevailed on to come out of the grave." Thompson gives other records of this sort of behaviour also, but says that he regards the behaviour of those who followed Isaac Heron to his final resting-place in Manston churchyard, near Leeds, as more typical of Gypsy funeral custom. The Rev. D. M. M. Bartlett has published a very full account of this funeral in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*: "After the body had been lowered into the earth the mourners came to the foot, and there crouched down, bending themselves nearly double and leaning forward right over the grave, staring down at the coffin as if they would pierce the wood with their gaze. Thus they remained for some little time, rocking themselves backwards and forwards in grief, and then quietly rose and walked away." At two recent Gypsy funerals that I have witnessed the behaviour has been somewhat similar, silent, undemonstrative, but most impressive in its sincerity. Among Welsh Gypsies there is a traditional belief that tears disturb the repose of the dead, and so lamentation at funerals is tabooed.

The return of relatives to the grave on the anniversary of the death, or, as formerly, at some special time of the year such as Christmas (according to Crabb), but never so far as I know on the anniversary of the burial, is an established Gypsy custom. Nowadays there are no rites

attached to the customs—the visitor may kneel in prayer for a moment or so, but that is all. It is a decorous and respectful pilgrimage. It was not always so. On January 30th, 1708, Charles Boswell (“a mad spark, that, having an estate of about two hundred per annum, yet runs about. He is mighty fine and brisk and keeps company with a great many gentlemen, knights and esquires”) was buried at Rossington in Yorkshire. Nearly one hundred years later Edward Miller recorded in his *History and Antiquities of Doncaster* that “for a number of years it was the custom of Gypsies, from the south, to meet at his tomb annually, and there perform some of their accustomed rites, one of which was to pour a flagon of ale on the grave”: hot ale, according to a letter written by the rector of the parish in 1820 and quoted by Thompson. Another Boswell, buried at Selston in 1821, was also visited annually and ale was also spilled upon his grave, and it is said that the visits, but not necessarily the spillings, continued until 1870 and perhaps even later. Ten years later, on the eve of Horn-castle August Fair, No Name Heron and Taiso Boswell were “slayen by thunder and lightning and a fire Ball” at Tetford on the Lincolnshire Wolds, and every Horn-castle Fair time for some years afterwards members of the clan visited their tomb. We have, in fact, an eye-witness account of this, for Harriet Williams, who in 1831 was already married to Jack Gray, a son-in-law of both No Name and Taiso and who survived until 1906, clearly recollected these visits and told the Rev. George Hall about them. According to her the men of the party on each occasion walked bare-headed to the grave, with mugs of beer in their hands, and after spilling some, drank the rest in silence, each “making a bit o’ prayer to hisself.” And when that was done the women visited the churchyard in twos and threes. Crabb says that “most families visit the graves of their near relations once in the year; generally about the time of Christmas. Then the depository of the dead becomes a rallying spot for the living; there they renew their attachments and sympathies and

give and receive assurances of continued good will. At such periods, however, they are often addicted to intemperance." There is no doubt that at one time funeral feasts were held at the grave on the anniversary of the death or at some particular season of the year (both Wittich and Liebich record the custom for German Gypsies), and this drinking at the grave and spilling of liquor on the grave is a survival of the ancient custom, though survival is too strong a word, for I think the custom so far as British Gypsies are concerned is wholly dead. Crabb's reference to intemperance is supported by an incident at Odstock in Wiltshire, recorded by Thompson. One Josiah Scamp was buried there in 1801, and annual visits were paid to his grave by relatives until they were prohibited by the church authorities because of the nuisance caused by drunken brawlers. This prohibition called forth a curse from one of the deceased's daughters: "May the parson never be understood when he preaches—may the churchwarden be a bankrupt—may the clerk die before the year is out"—a curse that is said to have been fulfilled in every particular. Generally, however, the anniversary gatherings, of which there are many records, were decorous affairs, for they have not elsewhere provoked any complaints and, indeed, have more than once been remarked upon for their extreme reverence. Thompson says that one of the Grays, when visiting his wife's burial-place during the first Christmas season following his bereavement, lay on her grave silently grieving for three hours or more, oblivious of the cold rain pouring down, and barely aware of the presence at his side of an aged sister, who had made the long journey with him "to keep him from harm." Neither of the mourners ate anything at all that day: nor did they on the first anniversary of the death, when a similar pilgrimage was undertaken. Such behaviour, though in this instance rather extreme perhaps, is not untypical of modern Gypsies. I know a Gypsy woman who has spent each of the six anniversaries of her husband's death sitting all day at his graveside, fasting.

After the burial comes the sacrifice. And this is the best known of all Gypsy funeral customs, and the one most widely practised in the past, though to-day it has almost died out. There are innumerable accounts of these Gypsy holocausts, varying only in the extent of the sacrifice made, and it will not be out of place to mention a few here.

In 1769, following the burial of a Gypsy woman at Tring in Buckinghamshire, "the survivors took all her wearing apparel and burnt them, including silk gowns, silver buckles, gold ear-rings, trinkets, etc., for such is their custom." In 1773 "the cloaths of the late Diana Boswell, Queen of the Gypsies, value £50, were burnt in the middle of the Mint, Southwark, by her principal courtiers, according to ancient custom." After Absolom Smith's funeral at Twyford in Leicestershire, in 1826, his tent, bedding, panniers, and fiddle were burnt; and after Constance Smith's burial at Highwater in 1830, "the whole of her wardrobe was burnt, and her donkey and dog were slaughtered by her nearest relatives, in conformity to a custom remaining among her tribe."

George Borrow, in *Romano Lavo-Lil*, says that after Riley Boss had been buried in Brompton churchyard, Shurensi Smith (his last remaining wife) and a large number of his relatives returned to Notting Hill, "not to divide his property among them . . . but to destroy it. They killed his swift pony—still swift, though twenty-seven years of age—and buried it deep in the ground, without depriving it of its skin. Then they broke the caravan and cart to pieces, making of the fragments a fire, on which they threw his bedding, carpets, curtains, blankets and everything which would burn. Finally they dashed his mirrors, china and crockery to pieces, hacked his metal pots, dishes and what-not to bits, and flung the whole on the blazing pile." And when the fire had died down the remains were collected and buried furtively at nightfall, but as the gorgios heard there was silver among them, and began rooting about in search of it, they were dug up again and thrown into a deep pit of water at some distance from the "Arches."

But everything, says Thompson, was not destroyed at this funeral, for Shuri insisted on keeping two small copper cauldrons in memory of her *rom*, and these cauldrons were in the possession of her grandchildren at Hull, who told the late Rev. G. Hall about them.

Though there are very few records of mementoes being kept I think it was probably a fairly general custom. Crabb, writing of Hampshire Gypsies, says that they "have a singular custom of burning all the clothes belonging to anyone among them deceased, with the straw, litter, etc., of his tent," but a little later on he says that "their attachment to the horse, donkey, rings, snuff-box, silver spoons, and all things, except the clothes of the deceased relatives, is very strong. With such articles they will never part except in the greatest distress; and then they only pledge some of them *which are redeemed as soon as they possess the means*." This surprising statement had been taken to mean that *none* of these things were destroyed, but I do not think that Crabb, who was a most careful and accurate reporter, intended anything of the sort. He meant, I am sure, that one, or perhaps some, of these things were kept from the sacrifice as mementoes of the dead. Certainly there is no evidence to support his statement if he did mean it to be taken in the wholesale sense. But a ring or a snuff-box, a silver spoon or a watch, these things have been kept out of the holocaust by Hampshire Gypsies in the past, and also, I feel sure, by Gypsies elsewhere. I, at least, have seen a good many heirlooms of great age among modern Gypsies.

Riley Boss died somewhere about the middle of the nineteenth century and at about the same time the funeral pyre of a Gypsy, supposed to have been Henry Lock, was raised by the Severn, probably in Worcestershire. "Cuthbert Bede," writing in *Notes and Queries*, says that he was informed by an eye-witness that "first they burnt his fiddle and then they burnt a lot of beautiful Witney blankets, as were as good as new; and then they burnt a sight of books—for he was quite a scholar . . . and then there was his grindstun . . . they couldn't burn *him*! so they carried



him two miles, and hove him right into Siv'un ; that's true, you may take my word for it, sir ; for I was one as helped them to carry it."

The Locks, like the Bosses, were, of course, Boswells before they changed their name. The Boswells were a large clan, and the Aaron Boswell, who was buried at Long Whatton in Leicestershire in 1866, belonged to another branch. Thompson records that after his funeral "his clothes, bedding, tent, cart, grinding barrow and harness were burned ; and his crockery and iron pans pounded to fragments, and then buried in the earth together with two copper kettles previously battered out of shape, some pewter jugs and plates which were first hacked to pieces, and a quantity of cutlery, forks, spoons and tools ; whilst his horses and donkeys were dispatched to Nottingham for sale, in charge of a man who did not belong to the family, but had been appointed by them to dispose of animals, and of things like the iron tyres of the cart wheels that could not be made away with at all easily. He was employed because the mourners themselves might sell nothing, according to Caroline Boswell, Aaron's granddaughter, who also insisted that any article touched by a dying man shortly before he expired must be destroyed whether it was his own property or not."

There were plenty of funeral sacrifices in the 'seventies and 'eighties, but as these were very similar in detail they need not be dealt with here. In 1894 occurred a funeral pyre rather different in detail, when Oli Heron was buried at Withernsea. On the evening of the day of the funeral his widow, Wasti Young, "having removed her personal belongings from their living-waggon, had it taken down to the seashore, where, early next morning, and as the tide was rising, some of her kinsfolk set it alight. Towards evening, by which time the ashes of the fire had been carried away on the ebb, they returned to the incombustible wreckage, to break up the iron stove and pans, and any crockery or glass unshivered by the heat, and to cast the refuse into the sea when the water was at its lowest."

A year or two later, after the death of Ambrose Smith's daughter, Lavinia, in a house at Yarmouth, "her clothes and bedding and what little furniture she possessed were burned on the foreshore just beyond the north end of the town ; and her jewellery, the fragments of a tea service valued at £10, some broken or battered domestic utensils, the remains of an iron bedstead, and the carcase of a pet dog poisoned by the survivors, were rowed out to sea more than a mile ; and then thrown overboard." In January, 1899, Savaina Lovell was buried in Liverpool. Immediately the mourners returned from the service they broke up "her crockery, and beat her silver teapot, tray, sugar-basin and spoons into shapeless masses, as a preliminary to filling them, and her jewellery, into two or three small sacks, which were unobtrusively dropped into the Mersey from one of the ferry boats later in the evening ; but her clothes were not destroyed until some days afterwards, when her husband, Bui Boswell . . . and those of the funeral party who had accompanied him to Jackson's Bridge, near Ormskirk, made a fire of them, close to a canal, on the surface of which they strewed the ashes."

In the early years of this century two funeral sacrifices stand out (there were many more, and probably as many again which were not recorded), that of Isaac Heron and that of Crimea Price. Isaac Heron was buried at Manston, and a very full account of the whole procedure has been published in the *Journal* of the Gypsy Lore Society. At 5.30 a.m. on February 25th, 1911 (the day after the funeral), his son, Iza, by arrangement with the blacksmith at Sutton-on-Trent, brought the old man's waggon on to a bare patch of garden behind the smithy. "He next removed the shafts, and wheels, and placed them, together with the harness, inside the van, which already contained a quantity of bedding, some old clothes, a hat, a pair of boots, and several small articles in a sack ; and then, having thrust straw inside as well, and saturated it with paraffin, he applied a light." A considerable crowd of villagers, not unnaturally, quickly gathered round, and one

woman persistently begged for a charred spindle as a memento and was as persistently refused. After the fire had burned itself out, the ashes were strewn about the garden and the scrap iron was given to the blacksmith. The stove, iron pans and the crockery were broken up and the fragments buried in the ground. The horse was taken to Doncaster where it was sold, probably to a slaughterer. But the hub caps and some hooks were kept by Iza himself, for some reason which no one has ever found out.

Crimea Price was four years old when, in September, 1911, he accidentally set himself on fire while his parents were away hop-picking near Dormington, in Herefordshire, and was so badly burned that he died in hospital next day. When news of his death was brought to the camp "members of the family took their living-van, which cost £80 to build, into the centre of the field, and then, amid much grief, broke it to pieces with axes, and making a funeral pyre of parts of the vehicle, set it alight and burnt it to ashes." Apparently a year or two previously a party of Smiths, stopping on Norton Common, near Weobley, which is another of the Herefordshire hopping centres, broke up their van and burned it on the death of a child. But this wholesale holocaust is most uncommon in connection with the death of children. It is then not customary to do more than destroy their clothes and perhaps a few of the things most intimately associated with them. This is the practice described by Miss Lyster in her book, *The Gypsy Life of Bestsy Wood*, and it has occurred this year in a *poshrat* Hampshire family with which I am acquainted. Wittich says that the same custom is current among German Gypsies. It is noteworthy that the Prices, though on one side they spring from the true black blood of the Ingrams, are a family with very little good Gypsy blood in them, and it is supposed that the Smiths referred to above are also largely gorgio in origin. Such families often cling most tenaciously to the old Gypsy customs and are often more wholesale in their observances of them than are the true Romanies. Thompson gives a number of instances in

support of this view : " On the death, near Madeley, in Cheshire, in 1898, of Vernon, son of Edward (alias Richard) Taylor, an itinerant barber who married Margery Lock's sister Lucy, his widow, Kodi Jones, not a thoroughbred Gypsy by any means, burned his waggon, and ridded herself of his other property ; and when Kodi herself died, on Sound Heath near Wrenbury, in the same county, her sons set fire to her caravan and broke up and buried her crockery and pans." Among Lincolnshire mixed stocks, too, vans have been destroyed on their owner's demise—Frank Elliot's, for example, in 1913. But Scottish tinklers, and the north country potters or muggers of similar origin, apparently do not make extensive sacrifices, if any at all, in these latter days, though the families settled at Kirk Yetholm used to burn the clothes of their dead, according to a writer in Blackwood quoted by Sir Walter Scott ; and so did the Cumberland Stewarts, even within the memory of William Stewart, who was barely sixty when I saw him in 1913 ; whilst in 1871 or 1872 a relative of mine residing near Windermere witnessed the burning of some clothes and bedding belonging to a member of the Miller family who died close to his house.

With the outbreak of the Great War the number of funeral sacrifices seems to have decreased. No doubt there were sacrifices during the war years that were not recorded—people were too busy making and recording other and greater sacrifices—and no doubt there were sacrifices in the years of the Long Armistice that passed unnoticed, but if so they were few, and few also have been recorded. Thompson records three, all in 1924. One of these was after the funeral of Levi Boswell on May 8th at Bromley, Kent. Levi, who had two crippled sons, had lived in the neighbourhood for close upon thirty years and was well known and well liked by many people. By profession he was a horse-dealer—he had a truly remarkable knowledge of horses even for a Gypsy and a great reputation for honesty—and he was also a showman, and these two callings naturally brought him much into touch with the

gorgios. His funeral procession was interesting : " He went to his rest wearing—as marks of his chieftainship of the clan Boswell—bright yellow socks and a muffler of brilliant red. Buried with him, according to custom, were also many little gifts most treasured by him. These were placed in the coffin secretly, and the members of his family are pledged never to disclose what they are. The coffin, half-hidden among flowers, was in a hearse drawn by six black horses richly caparisoned in purple and gold. On one of the front horses rode a postilion wearing a tight-fitting black tunic and purple knee-breeches and a black jockey cap. The widow rode in a motor car with her two sons, who, like herself, are crippled and use crutches. She wore a black dress with a bodice of Victorian fashion and a heavily-plumed hat. On foot followed a long procession of relatives." \* We have already seen the use of postilion and six horses in the Lancashire funeral of William West and we shall meet it again. The colours red and yellow are the Gypsy colours, but the use of yellow at British Gypsy funerals is unusual. After Levi's funeral there does not seem to have been a holocaust—no burning of living-waggon or slaughtering of horses—but many of his personal possessions and all his clothes were destroyed by fire.

But later in the same year, when Mrs. Sarah Bunce died at Reading, there was, following the funeral, a regular old-fashioned holocaust on the fair ground. Sarah was the daughter of Gypsies whose belongings at their death had been burned, and in her case everything was destroyed with the van and only money was saved. Still later in the year a Smith died at Chasetown, in Staffordshire, and was buried by the side of his wife at Wilnecote, near Tamworth. The body was dressed only in a shroud and no clothes were placed in the coffin, which did, however, contain his pipe and tobacco and a potato he had picked up on the road just prior to his last illness. After the funeral one of his daughters smashed up his crockery, and then his son placed the harness together with all his other

\* *The Daily Mail*, May 9th, 1924.

belongings in the van, into which he also poured a gallon or two of paraffin and then threw in a bundle of lighted straw. The van caught fire, but it did not burn well, and so one of the onlookers, a Gypsy, threw a stone through the back window, and thus caused a draught that soon encouraged the flames. When everything had been burned the son collected the metal trappings of the harness and threw them into a pond some little distance away.

There were two funeral pyres in 1926. On October 2nd, Plato Buckland, who was reported to be 102 years of age, was buried in Reading cemetery. He died at Marlow, and after the funeral his van and harness and all his belongings were burned at Marlow. There seems to be some doubt about his horse. Those papers that reported the occurrence, and they included the thoroughly reliable *Observer*, all maintain that it was shot. Thompson does not believe that it was, and there does seem to be some ground for believing that it was sold to a knacker in Maidenhead. But the more remarkable sacrifice occurred earlier in the year after the funeral of Caroline Penfold at Crediton, Devon, on April 17th. In some ways, indeed, this was the most remarkable holocaust of recent years.

Caroline Penfold was only twenty-six when she died from tuberculosis on April 15th. (Her husband, Christopher Penfold, had died only some three weeks earlier.) Penfold is not a Gypsy name, but a Devon name, though Penfolds appear to have married Gypsies on a number of occasions. Caroline was of good Gypsy blood, for her father was Thomas Roberts and her mother Defiance Pinfold, a daughter of the Thomas Pinfold whose funeral has already been described. In this case the ancient rites were observed to the letter—I think Caroline probably left instructions, for she was fiercely proud of her Romani blood, proud to an extent that I, personally, have met in no other Gypsy save Amos Churen—and the funeral was attended by Gypsies from a wide area, and also by many *poshrats*. Among the names of those that attended were Roberts, Pinfold, Gray, Birch, Holland, Stanley, Lee,

Smith, Penfold, Manley, Pateman and Darling. For twenty-four hours before her burial she lay in state in the waggon in which she died. A lighted candle was placed by her head and this was the only illumination in the waggon. Female relatives watched over the body, but anybody who so desired was at liberty to enter the waggon. So far as I know the whole camp fasted during these twenty-four hours and until after the holocaust. Caroline was buried in a shroud only. Her best dress and her finest underlinen were carefully folded inside out and placed in the coffin and her body was laid upon them with the arms straight down at her sides. In the coffin was placed all her jewellery except for one heavy gold ring. This jewellery was said to be very valuable, but I do not think she had very much and I do not believe that what she had was of any particular value. The ring, however, was undeniably good, a broad and heavy gold band of considerable antiquity. Also in the coffin were placed a silver comb, some small trinkets of which she was very fond, her snuff-box and a hammer. After the funeral a female relative smashed all the crockery, and her father packed everything else into the van, poured in paraffin and set it alight. When the fire had burned itself out the remaining metal was taken away and buried. The horse that normally drew the van, a young and strong piebald, was taken away by her brother and sold, but two other horses and one or two ponies were retained. Caroline was reputed to be wealthy and to keep a considerable amount of loose cash about her as well as having a very substantial balance in the Post Office Savings Bank. I do not know how true this is : certainly no money was destroyed. She was also reputed to have second sight, and for this there certainly seems to be some foundation. Nothing was planted on or around her grave, and there is nothing to indicate where she is buried. Curiously enough, when her father died the traditional Gypsy ceremonies were not observed. Nothing was buried with him, nothing was planted on the grave, nothing was burnt. Again a large

number of Gypsies from a wide area attended the funeral (most of the same names but also some Coopers) and at the conclusion of the service they surrounded the grave, peering down intently, repeating some Romani words and each throwing in a handful of earth. One man, whose name I do not know, also threw in a florin.

On April 28th, 1933, at Farnborough, Kent, Urania Boswell was buried. This is the funeral to which I have already referred. It created a great deal of interest and was widely reported in the national Press by an army of reporters, all of whom saw something different and none of whom seemed able to agree on any major point. Urania Boswell was the widow of Levi Boswell whose funeral I have already mentioned. Urania was the daughter of Gypsy Sarah, the Brighton "Queen," and Abraham Lee, who was, according to some of the papers, the original Gypsy Lee. I have yet to meet a Lee of any age who is not the original Gypsy Lee, and I have met a large number of Gypsies and an equally large number of *poshrats* who have laid claim to the same title. Indeed on Epsom Downs one Derby Day some years ago there were no less than three original Gypsy Lees doing a thriving trade, and none of them was truly Gypsy. Be that as it may, Urania Boswell—she was generally known as Reni—undoubtedly came of the aristocracy of English Gypsydom and married into an equally renowned family. And her funeral did attract much attention. The crowds that gathered were variously estimated at 15,000, 20,000 and 50,000, but it is beyond question that some hundreds of Gypsies attended and that the mourners did number fifty-two. As with her husband's funeral, so with hers, the coffin was drawn by six horses draped in black and with a postilion, dressed in black and wearing a black jockey cap, mounted on one of the front pair. The crippled sons, Herbert and Kenza, her daughter Nora (who got up from a hospital bed to come) and her brother Job Lee followed in one car, and another son and daughter, Levi and Georgina, with some other relatives in a second car. But the outstanding feature of this funeral is



that after it was over the living-waggon and the possessions of the deceased were not destroyed. Having regard to the lineage of Reni and the family into which she had married, this departure from tradition is truly astonishing, and shows all too clearly the waning strength of Romani customs in this country. Instead of burning it was decided that the waggon should be left exactly as it was when she died until it rotted away. I suppose this decision may be taken to show some faint remnant of the traditional Romani attitude towards the dead, but as it was an exceptionally well-furnished waggon I cannot think that it was left untouched for long.

Later in the same year, on November 22nd, another Gypsy queen was buried at Newport in Shropshire, and on this occasion the ancient tradition was observed to the letter. As the lady's name was Helen Shevlin, which is not a Gypsy name at all (though it is not unknown among Irish tinkers), this is at first almost as astonishing as the Boswell departure from tradition. Helen Shevlin, however, came of the very old, very deep Romani stock. She was Helen Price and she married Cornelius Shevlin, an Irishman of tinker stock. She was said to be the daughter of Bob Price and Jane Stevens. I knew her fairly well and she was actually the daughter of Amos Price (Bob's brother) and an Irishwoman of tinker stock named Mary Ann Duffy. She was thus the granddaughter of that Henry Price who married Helen Ingram. Now the Ingrams—the name has disappeared from the English roads (a very ancient man who died near Petersfield in 1907 or 1908 may have been the last of the male line)—were the true black blood of the Romani. They and the Chilcotts were regarded with something akin to awe, even by such old Gypsy families as the Herons and Boswells and Grays, nor is the name forgotten to-day. Helen Shevlin was very proud of her Ingram blood (very proud also of her Irish blood) so it is not surprising that ancient tradition was followed at her funeral.

It, too, was a funeral that attracted much attention. At

the time of her death Helen was near Crewe, and she was brought to Newport at considerable expense. The whole funeral is said to have cost some £300. A great concourse of Gypsies, some of whom came from long distances, attended and the *Crewe Chronicle* published a list of ninety names—a truly remarkable achievement on the part of the reporter, considering that this was a Gypsy funeral. These names make interesting reading. They include several Finneys, Duffeys, Toogoods, Braddocks, Egertons, Rollinsons and a Gorman, in addition to the Shevlins present. That surely is an amazing list of Irish names to be found at an English Gypsy funeral. Finney, Duffey, Braddock, Egerton and Gorman, as well as Shevlin, are names to be found among the travelling tinkers on the Irish roads to-day. I have not met either Toogood or Rollinson as Irish tinker names, but in view of the obvious connection between this English-Irish Gypsy woman and Irish tinkers I suspect that both are good tinker names. Of the other names there are many Locks and many Smiths, three Burtons, and one Price—all good English Gypsy names. The Locks and the Prices are very much intermingled, but, even so, it is rather strange that there should have been only one Price present.

After the funeral the whole crowd returned to Crewe and the four men who had acted as bearers at the funeral pulled the living-waggon away from the others into a corner of the field and, after they had taken out all the crockery and breakable possessions, packed the under-carriage with straw and poured paraffin over it. Before they could set it alight, however, some of the younger members present protested against what they considered waste. Their leader was one Jack Taylor and he had considerable support, particularly from other Taylors and a very tough individual named Carloman. For some time it looked as if a real old-fashioned *chingaripen* was going to develop, and blows were, in fact, exchanged between one of the Taylors and one of the Finneys (I think it was Arthur). But finally, after an impassioned address by Cornelius

Shevlin, the eldest son, the straw was set alight and all was well. A great change came over the assembly as soon as the fire started, and what had a few moments before appeared an angry crowd stood in complete and reverent silence until the *vardo* was consumed. The crockery was smashed and buried, and the horse (who was a great age) was sold in Crewe about a week later. There have been holocausts since Helen Shevlin's, of course—Jemina Brazil's led to a lawsuit—but the custom does not, I think, require further description.

It is, perhaps, worthy of mention that both Urania Boswell and Helen Shevlin were wealthy women. Urania was reputed to have left £15,000 or so—though there has been some argument about the actual amount—Helen Shevlin left £30,000 and there has been no argument about this. She carried in her *vardo* a great deal of money, which was taken before the burning and divided by Cornelius between the sons and daughters, and Urania Boswell is reported to have had a hundred £5 notes kept in her waggon. Both women owned considerable house property.

Probably we have seen the last of Gypsy holocausts, at least on the grand scale. Economic conditions and the great infusion of gorgio blood have done their work, and the present generation of travellers think more of utility than of tradition. It is very often said that the Gypsy has no superstition and knows no God. I do not think either statement is in the least degree true. He has a very great respect for the dead, a much greater respect than is normally to be found among gorgios, and he is undoubtedly frightened of the spirits of the dead. It is this *trashiben* of the *mulo* that has been at the bottom of all Gypsy funeral rites. Hard as the sacrifice has been on the remaining members of the family on many occasions, sinful as the waste may have appeared to our materialistic and utilitarian minds, it has for the race as a whole been a beneficial custom, for it has kept very much alive the spirit of independence and endeavour. More has been sacrificed with the passing of sacrifice than ever was lost in the flames.

## VI

## SOCIAL ORGANISATION

IT is difficult to believe that there is any social organisation among the Gypsies. A Gypsy family on the road, a casual visit to a Gypsy encampment, do not leave an impression of organisation. There is obviously a headman and it is equally obvious that he has some authority—but that is about all. It is a deceptive impression. I do not mean by that that there is a firm organisation among the Gypsies, that Gypsy families are subject to discipline as we, in this age of bureaucratic regimentation, understand the word. There is nothing of that sort. It would be entirely foreign to the Gypsy temperament. But there is a social organisation, and I am quite convinced that the obvious presence of the headman has led to too much importance being attached to him by most of the investigators of Romani life from George Borrow onwards. Borrow, for example, writes much of Jasper Petulengro. He knew Petulengro well, and Petulengro was a headman and a man of substance and importance. Borrow accepted him as such, looked no further, and so unconsciously stressed too greatly his importance.

Jasper Petulengro was Ambrose Smith, the son of Mireli Smith. Mireli was herself a daughter of another Mireli Smith, whose second husband was John Chilcott, by whom she had a son, bearing the same name. Around these two children of old Mireli Smith was built up a clan that travelled East Anglia and engaged very largely in horse-dealing. The headmen were Ambrose Smith and John Chilcott. This clan, despite its sub-divisions (Ambrose Smith had his headquarters around Norwich and John Chilcott his around Woodbridge), was a single, closely-knit, social and economic unit, which on special occasions, such as funerals, would assemble as a whole and which would sometimes, as on the fringe of London, trade as a

whole. Now, Mireli Smith, the younger, had six children, Ambrose and a younger son Faden (who seems never to have married), and four daughters, Laini, Elizabeth, Liti and Prudence. These formed one subdivision. The other was formed by John Chilcott and his four daughters, Union, Caroline, Florence and Shuri. Ambrose's four sisters all married: Laini to Tom Cooper, who was deported; Elizabeth to Elijah Buckley; Liti to Būi Brown; and Prudence to Matt Barker, a gorgio horse-dealer. John Chilcott's four daughters also married: Union to Charles Lee; Caroline to Tom Lee; Florence to Wester Boswell; and Shuri to Taiso Young. But when these eight women married they did not leave the clan. In every case their husbands came to join the clan, to live, travel, and work with them. It was, in fact, a typical example of a matrilineal and matrilocal society. And there are plenty of other examples in Gypsy history.

There was, for example, another East Anglian clan which migrated to Blackpool and settled there. This clan had its origin in another Ambrose Smith, the paternal uncle of the Ambrose Smith who was Borrow's Jasper Petulengro. This Ambrose Smith married Mireli Draper and had five daughters, Honor, Fēmi, Rachel, Moll and Athalia, who was nicknamed Happy. He also had three sons, but they need not concern us because they, with their father, were transported. The daughters married: Honor to her first cousin Frank Smith; Fēmi to Sampson Robinson; Rachel to Nixi Lovell; Moll to Golden Hope; and "Happy" to a man named Nicholson. The men joined their wives. Frank Smith and Sampson Robinson were the headmen of this clan, but there seems to be little doubt that in its early days at any rate the real force in the society was old Mireli Draper.

A third, very much larger, and, in Gypsydom at least, more famous organisation was the north country clan headed by "No Name" Heron and Taiso Boswell, who were cousins. Here again there were subdivisions, but the clan was a single social unit, at least during the lifetime of

“No Name” and Taiso, who were inseparable companions until their deaths at Tetford in 1831, where they were struck by lightning. After this tragedy there does not seem to have been any definite headman, and the whole organisation was much looser, but it still remained a clan. Matrimonial relationships in this clan are complicated by the fact that most of the women married more than once and because “No Name” went in for wives on a big scale. But Thompson has worked them out as well as they can be worked out. Taiso Boswell had only one wife, Sophia Heron, who was the daughter of “No Name’s” elder brother. By her he had six daughters, Maria, Lucy, Seji, Betsy, Dorilia and Delēta. Maria first of all married David Williams, but this was a purely temporary affair and he later migrated to America. Her permanent husband was Jack Gray. Lucy married Riley Boss; Sēji, Joseph Smith; Betsy, Job Williams; Dorilia, Khulai Heron; and Delēta, Allen Boswell. “No Name’s” adventures in matrimony are not so simple. He had many wives, including his niece Sophia, who became Taiso’s wife, and he had some of them at the same time. By his niece he had a daughter whose name has been given as Sēji. By Rose Lovell he had Eldorai, Eliza, Waddi, Amelia and Sarah. Then there were two closely related women, Sibella Smith or Boss and Seni Boss or Smith, and one of these bore him two more daughters—Emanaia and Hannah. His two permanent wives appear to have been Rose Lovell and Sibella Smith, who was also called Boss. These daughters all married and most of them more than once. Eldorai married “Stumpy” Frank Heron. Eliza married first Jack Gray, who later became the husband of Maria Boswell, and then his brother Oseri. Waddi married first Jack Gray (apparently at the same time as he was married to Maria) and later Oti Printer. Amelia married Pirus Gray, another brother of the much-married Jack. Sarah married first Wester Boswell (this was a temporary affair), then Major Boswell (who later migrated to America), and then Jack Lovell. Emanaia (who was also called Smith

and Boss) married "Big" Frank Heron. Hannah (who had the same aliases as her sister) married first "Big" Frank Heron and then "Kaki" Sam Boswell. Further complications in this astonishing family are caused by the daughter of "No Name" by his niece, for she lived first with Job and then with David Williams, and later with Jack Gray (who must, I fancy, have been an exceptionally attractive man), for he raised yet another family by Harriet Williams (who was Maria Boswell's daughter by her first marriage to David Williams), and did so at just about the same time as the family he had by Maria. I have not mentioned any of the sons of "No Name," for when they married it was with women outside the clan, and they left to join their wives' families. Similarly I have mentioned only one son of Taiso Boswell, Wester, for Ned married outside the clan and left to join his wife's people on doing so. Wester did the same thing after his temporary alliance with Sarah Heron. Similarly inside the clan "Big" Frank Heron, "Kaki" Sam Boswell and Major Boswell all, sooner or later, made permanent alliances with women outside the clan and on doing so left to join the families of their wives, leaving (as is the invariable Gypsy custom) their children behind them. Though the men drifted away either on their first marriage or on the acquisition of permanent wives, the husbands of all these women came into the clan. In the next generation relationships in this clan were much more stable, but I do not think there is any need to trace them further. Though numbers dropped fairly rapidly, owing to large scale emigration to America, the same rule held good. The men joined the people of their wives: the women brought their husbands into the clan. It was a matrilineal and matrilocal society just as much as was that of Ambrose Smith—John Chilcott and of Mireli Draper.

A similar state of affairs is to be found in the Welsh Locks. Mairik Lock, who was the eldest son of Henry Lock, married Mary Smith and had two sons and eight daughters. The two sons married, one a Draper and the

other a gorgie woman named Dixon, and in each case left the clan. The eight daughters also married and in every case the husband joined the clan.

It is not so easy to find clear-cut examples of the sort I have given above for the south country Gypsies, the Gypsies of the south-west and west midlands, or even for the Welsh Gypsies. Study of these groups began too late for any such evidence to be collected. Yet even in these groups there is a strong suggestion of a loosely organised matrilineal society. No one would suggest that the famous Welsh Gypsy family of Woods was not a clan, but it was a clan of rather a different nature due to entirely different conditions. The Woods were in Wales long before any other Gypsies, and they came into Wales under the leadership of Abram Wood. They were cut off from all contact with other Gypsies for many years and so there was a great deal of inter-marriage and a number (surprisingly few all the same) of marriages with the Welsh gorgie. Even so, when contact was re-established and marriages took place, the matrilineal rule appears to have operated and husbands joined their wives' families.

In these matrilineal and matrilineal clans the only exception to the rule that husbands joined the families of their wives was the headman, who was generally, but not always, the eldest son. His wife joined him. But, even so, her property remained her own, and should she die childless or with infant children, her husband had no claim on her property, which returned to her family. Gypsy laws of inheritance are very complex and I do not pretend that I understand them—nor have I found a *Romano Rai* who does understand them fully. Generally speaking, the laws of inheritance excluded all paternal kindred and all women as possible heirs. Beyond that, there seems to have been a good deal of variation as between clan and clan, but that at least seems to have been a firm rule, and, though conditions have altered so greatly of recent years, and though the inheritance laws have altered to keep pace with economic conditions, it does seem that that law is not



yet entirely defunct. Money and stock-in-trade (and it must be remembered that some Gypsies were and are wealthy, judged even by modern gorgio standards) was inherited by the eldest son, or, if no son arrived, by the eldest grandson, who might, of course, be the son of a daughter. But he must be grown-up. He could not inherit if he was not grown-up. No doubt the age at which manhood was attained varied a good deal from clan to clan, but it was generally, if not always, younger than under our own law. If there was no adult male in the direct line the inheritance passed to the nearest maternal kinsman of the deceased, a brother, an uncle, a nephew or a cousin. There has in the past been considerable dispute as to the order of precedence between a brother and a maternal uncle, and as to the merits of seniority and mere age among nephews and cousins. But it is certain that paternal kindred were excluded. The rule that barred women from succeeding to an inheritance does not, however, appear to have been universal among British Gypsies. Widows were always allowed to keep what was left of travelling and domestic equipment after the funeral destruction, even in those families that barred them as successors. And among south country Gypsies and the Gypsies of the Welsh border I think the law was somewhat less stringent. When Prudence Buckland, the widow of Sidnal Smith, died at Charlbury without issue she left a farm and £1,500 in gold and her sister, Sēgul, inherited them, despite the fact that there were nephews alive. Furthermore, the fact that Prudence left this property suggests that she came into possession of her husband's property at his death. Amos Churen was very definite that, should the husband die and there be no surviving son or grandson of age, all the property went to the widow, and Gerania Barney (who was born a Lee) bears out this statement. Gerania also maintained that the sister of a deceased woman had a better right to inheritance than nephews or cousins and would inherit without opposition (which is what happened in the case of Prudence Buck-

land), but neither she nor Amos would hear of any succession by paternal kindred. Should there be a son or grandson of age the inheritance passed to him without quibble and with it went the duty of supporting the widow. Neither in the north nor in the south was there any division of the inheritance, it being considered the duty of the heir to support so far as was necessary all those people previously dependent upon the deceased.

There are many examples in Gypsy lore of the working of these inheritance rules, and some of them have been collected by Thompson. I quote from a paper published by him one case from the Lawrence Boswell family : " Lias's paternal grandfather, Moses Boswell, had for his first wife a Saiëra Buckland, whose marriage gift included a sum of money and a pair of diamond-studded shoe buckles. She died young, leaving two sons, Sam and Nathan, who were little more than infants, and therefore debarred from inheriting. Moses intended to bury the buckles with her, but some uncles of hers arrived before the funeral, and, laying claim to them as well as to her private money, received both at his hands, for he did not dispute their right to them. What happened further, beyond a quarrel among these Buckland uncles as to what should be done with the inheritance, is not known ; nor can anyone say now exactly who the claimants were. Moses himself died in 1855, survived by Sam but not Nathan ; also by his second wife, Trënit Heron, and most of her family, which ranged from Nelson, a married man of several years standing, to a girl of about fifteen. Sam, who shortly afterwards went to America, declined the inheritance because of the responsibility attached, and it passed to Nelson, with whom Trënit travelled until her death many years later." There are many other instances to be found in the pages of the *Journal* and some interesting cases of dispute. One of these, which occurred in 1903, was between the widow of a childless man and a son of his elder brother, and was reported at the time in the Scottish papers, for it came into the Law Courts. It was brought

by Eldorai Smith, who married her cousin William Lovell in New Jersey in 1868, "Gypsy fashion, by joining hands and promising each other before the rest of the tribe," against Christopher Lovell, the son of her husband's brother. Eldorai and William came back to Scotland in 1876 and lived in a van at Vinegar Hill, and it was here on July 2nd, 1903, that William died. He left goods valued at £357, and Christopher, who was the son of William's brother Cornelius and Eldorai's sister, Deloraifi, seized them. Eldorai brought the action for a decree declaratory of marriage and after one Dr. Thomas Mowat of Clydebank had deposed "from personal knowledge" that the Gypsy marriage custom was as Eldorai had stated, she was declared to have been legally married. She then got the goods back by threatening to prosecute her nephew for theft. It is, by the way, interesting to note that the papers of the time called her Mary Ann Smith or Lovell and not Eldorai. She was then fifty-two and obviously a woman of vigorous and determined temperament. Her brother, Shandres Smith, who talked about this case to Thompson, fully approved his sister's action, maintaining that when a man died everything went to his widow, except the money, which was divided equally between the sons and daughters. It seems to indicate some divergence of opinion between the families, the Smith side believing that the widow could inherit and the Lovell side believing that the goods should go to the nearest male relative on the maternal side. Christopher would be not this, however, for Shandres as brother would have precedence over a nephew. Nor can I believe that families as closely connected as these Smiths and Lovells could have different inheritance laws. Shandres's statement that the widow inherits over the heads of grown sons is not one for which I can find any independent support. And it is well to remember that when Gypsies appeal to gorgio law it is, as often as not, no more than an attempt to set aside Romani custom.

For Shandres's statement that the money was always divided equally between the sons and daughters there is a

good deal of support, so long as it refers only to money actually in the possession of the deceased, that is, in the *vardo* or somewhere in the camp, at the time of death, and not to money that may be deposited in a bank. So long ago as 1821 a certain Absolom Smith died at Twyford, in Leicestershire, and each of his children, of whom several were daughters, is said to have received £100. Another account says that he left a gallon of sovereigns and that they were divided equally among his children. Certain it is that nowadays the rule that there shall be no division of inheritance does not include the money actually in the possession of the deceased at the time of death. At Helen Shevlin's funeral the money in the *vardo* was divided by her eldest son Cornelius with his brothers and sisters. The money in Urania Boswell's waggon was divided between her five children. And I know personally of the same thing happening in six recent cases, in none of which was there any holocaust after the burial.

The division of inheritance rule no longer applies universally, probably not even generally. Inheritance laws and practices are largely based upon conceptions of kinship and changes in the latter are always followed, though never very quickly, by changes in the former. English Gypsy ideas on kinship have changed considerably, for they will now trace relationship and descent through both parents just as we do. Even so, the English Gypsy, though he no longer practises matrilocal marriage (that custom has not entirely died out), though he will now recognise kinship and descent through both parents, though he will at death divide the inheritance, though he will accept paternal kindred as heirs to inheritance (in this connection I must point out that in one recent case of which I have personal knowledge, the direct line having failed, the inheritance passed to the maternal kindred though there were plenty of paternal kindred available, including the dead man's brother), remains matrilineal in outlook. Circumstances and economic conditions have forced and are forcing changes in his outlook and in his actions, but they cannot affect the

rooted custom of his race. Even to-day you will find children taking the mother's name. Originally the whole of our Gypsy stock was matrilineal, the mother was the sole fount of kinship, and you do not get rid of the beliefs and instincts of centuries in a hurry.

It is in the light of all this that we must consider the headman. I do not suggest that he was a mere figurehead or that he was a man without authority. Some headmen wielded very great authority indeed—Abram Wood, for example. But Abram Wood really was more of a king than a headman. Nor can there be any doubt that Ambrose Smith (Borrow's *Petulengro*) exercised great authority. John Chilcott did also, and the same is true of "No Name" Heron and Taiso Boswell, and, in Scotland, of the great Billy Marshall. And we know of other headmen of great authority. Dick Heron was such a man, a headman of great and very wide authority and one noteworthy in another way. He objected very much to his sons and grandsons going away when they married, and it is said of him that in an attempt to overcome this he organised wife-getting expeditions. He would travel round the country every now and again (so it is said) accompanied by all the young men of the clan who were of marriageable age and all of them ready equipped for married life even down to the kettles and pans. When they came upon a likely girl they just carried her off and discarded her with as little ceremony if she did not prove satisfactory. I imagine the tale is untrue. But there can be no doubt that Dick Heron did try to found a paternal clan, and he failed miserably. His sons and grandsons adhered to their wives' families in the normal way. Another headman of considerable authority who failed in a similar way was Bui Boswell. In the days when the clan system was in operation, portions were always splitting off from the main body and founding smaller clans of their own. This was inevitable because if a clan got much too big it became unwieldy and uneconomic. There are plenty of records of this splitting off from the main body—the Locks who went into

Wales and were really Boswells are a good example—and no doubt the clan we commenced this chapter with, the Ambrose Smith–John Chilcott clan, was really a split from a much larger, more loosely organised society, and it in its turn split. The headmen of these break-away parties were always men of some force of character. Bui Boswell was one. He belongs to the huge Heron-Boswell clan, and he had ten daughters who were all very fond of him. He broke away from the main body and tried to found a maternal clan of his own. He failed because he treated his sons-in-law far too harshly. It is said that he tried to force them into submission by flogging them and starving them, that he would put the police on to them to bring them back if they left him, and that two of them, who failed to meet with his approval (both gorgios), were dismissed and their wives forced to accept the dismissal. He certainly did do this, and he certainly did put the police on to erring sons-in-law, and it is quite probable that he also flogged them. He was, in any case, a peculiar man. But he failed, and he failed because he exercised too much authority. Dick Heron failed for very much the same reason. There are plenty of other examples, but Abram Wood is the only one who made a real success of it.

Among English Gypsies (among most Gypsies for that matter) the mother is usually the main supporter of the family, and it is the women of the family who do the lion's share of the work. That, and the fact that the mother was originally the fount of all kinship, that the whole structure of society was matrilineal, gave to the women enormous power. The "clans" broke up in the end as they were always bound to do, and to-day there are no clans though the social structure is still vaguely discernible. But there is still the family, the group of two or three families, the women still do most of the work, the mother is still the *main* supporter of the family—and there is still a headman.

For George Borrow, Jasper Petulengro was the chief of the Gypsies. But that clan was founded by the two children of old Mireli Smith, and Ambrose Smith was the son

of one of the founders. He stayed with his mother until she died. Can there be any doubt who was the real ruler of that sub-division? For the matter of that, can there be any doubt what force it was that held those two divisions together? Yet we hear nothing, or practically nothing, of Mireli Smith, the younger. We do know something of Mireli Draper, who was a woman of outstanding force of character, but we hear more of the two headmen. We hear nothing of the mothers of "No Name" and Taiso Boswell. But are we to suppose, therefore, they were of no importance—in a matrilineal society that gave rise to so huge a clan as that founded by the two cousins? And when these old ladies died, the Mireli Smiths and the Mireli Drapers of Gypsydom, were there no women to take their places?

The fact of the matter is that from George Borrow downwards we have paid far too much attention to the Gypsy men and far too little to the Gypsy women, far too much attention to Gypsy "kings" and Gypsy "chiefs" and far too little to Gypsy "queens." Indeed we have been inclined to take these Gypsy headmen at whatever valuation they set upon themselves for the benefit of the gorgios and to regard "Gypsy queen" as a title put on to add colour to fortune-telling and to bemuse servant girls. But whereas Gypsy chiefs may be common enough—they are often created for the benefit of the gorgios—and Gypsy kings come and go (generally in the columns of the daily Press) you hear very little about Gypsy queens. Nor in my experience can you get Gypsies to talk very much about their queens, and they just do not seem to know what the honour amounts to. But then the Gypsy will not talk about the kings he does not want to talk about, and the *Romane Raia* have yet a lot to find out from the Romanies and much that they will never find out. Personally I have no doubt that the title Gypsy chief, even when bestowed by Gypsies upon a Gypsy, does not amount to much. I am not so sure about Gypsy queens. There are not so many of them as one might suppose—I discount, of course,

the obvious fakes of the show grounds and pierheads—and there is always a good deal of bother about the succession when a queen dies, which is surely rather odd if the title means nothing at all. Urania Boswell was “Queen of the Gypsies.” It was a title acknowledged by other Gypsies. She was the wife, you will remember, of Levi Boswell, the Gypsy Chief. Now on the headstone of Levi’s grave you will find this inscription :

In Loving Memory  
of  
Levi Boswell  
The Gypsy Chief  
Who passed away May 4th 1924  
Aged 77 years.  
A light is from our household gone,  
A voice we loved is still,  
A place is vacant in our home,  
Which never will be filled.

And when Urania died, they added this :

Also of  
Urania Boswell  
(Gipsy Lee)  
Beloved of the above  
Who died 24 April, 1933  
Aged 81 years  
Reunited home at last.

No mention, you will notice, of any such title as “Queen.” Yet Urania was acknowledged as Queen, and a good deal of care was taken, it would seem, over the choice of her successor. But Levi is referred to as “The Gypsy Chief,” yet so far as I know there was no bother about his successor and I do not even know if there was a successor. It seems to me to be deliberately misleading. And I am more than ever sure that there is more to a Gypsy queen than the mere title.

Urania Boswell was Queen of the Gypsies, and by that was meant not merely the Gypsies of Kent or Brighton or



of Southern England, but Queen of the Gypsies of England. I do not think the title included the Gypsies of Wales, but I am not sure that it does not imply a certain suzerainty. Her successor was Morjiana Lee of Blackpool—a far cry from Bromley. I do not know how the successor is chosen (nor does anybody else outside the Gypsies themselves and, I imagine, only a comparatively small circle of them), and I do not know what reasons govern the choice any more than I know what being a Queen of the Gypsies implies in the way of duties and obligations. The Rev. D. M. M. Bartlett, a *Romano Rai* of great experience, has suggested that there are two elements in the choice that appear to be more or less constant and of which the second is by far the most important.

(1) Money or property, possessed either by the individual or the family.

(2) Family, and all that the word implies. Not necessarily direct descent, but the possession of blood in which flows the richest blend of the real old families and is unmixed with gorgio or mumper taint.

So far as (1) is concerned, Urania Boswell was wealthy and was succeeded by the wealthy Morjiana Lee. And Selina Lee, who was Reni's sister-in-law and who became Queen of Kent and Sussex Gypsies when the title of Queen of the Gypsies went to the north, was definitely very comfortably off and quite possibly wealthy. Helen Shevlin, who was also a Queen (but I am not sure what she was Queen of, nor do I know how she ranked with Urania Boswell) was a very wealthy woman. She was succeeded by Data Burton, who was not wealthy but was certainly not poor.

So far as (2) is concerned, Urania Boswell was the daughter of Abraham Lee and grand-daughter of Fighting Zacki Lee who is said to have died in 1902 at the age of 128. Her great-grandparents included David Lee and Sophy Stanley. There is no lack of good blood here, and she married a Boswell. Her successor, Morjiana Lee, had in her veins the blood of Woods, Lees and Coopers, was

the daughter of Alice Wood and Henry Lee, her grandmothers were "Blind Nelly" Wood and Seni Cooper, and her great-grandparents included Jane Boswell and Valentine, the son of Abram Wood. This is indeed a royal lineage, as Bartlett points out. Helen Shevlin was a Price and descended from the true black blood of the Ingrams. Her successor, Data Burton, was born Ashela Price, the daughter of Kradok and the grand-daughter of Fred Price, and in her veins was Lock, Wood and possibly a dash of Ingram blood. At least as ancient and honourable a descent as one could wish.

I think Mr. Bartlett's second factor may be taken as proved and his first is probably constant. Does not the insistence on ancient lineage and unadulterated blood suggest that some importance is vested in this apparently nebulous title? For myself, I am convinced that great importance is attached to the title and that it carries much weight and authority in ways which we have never discovered and quite probably never will discover.

I am also convinced that the *real* authority in any Gypsy camp is held by one of the women—probably the eldest—and in any Gypsy family by the mother. I am aware, of course, that this is not apparent on a casual visit to a Gypsy camp, that it is not noticeable even when one knows Gypsies fairly well. The apparent authority rests with the father, and, indeed, in all small or unimportant matters the authority is with him. But is it not an extraordinary thing that we do not know the name of a single Gypsy law-giver? That the Gypsies have laws is beyond dispute. Just what they are we do not know, and we know only a few cases in which law has obviously operated, but it is evident that they exist. Yet the only English Gypsy name that can possibly be called that of a law-giver is Newsome Heron—and he apparently only legislated on card playing! The reason surely is that Gypsy law, or such Gypsy law as still survives, is and always has been in the hands of the women, handed down from Queen to Queen, from mother to mother. The mother, let it be remembered, is

the main support of the family ; the society, let it be remembered, is matrilineal and was until recently matrilocal ; and it is always the mother, or wife, who holds the money, all of it, and lets her husband have whatever may be necessary for business or pleasure. It is an old gorgio saying that the one that pays the piper calls the tune. So in all big matters, when any big decision has to be made, when some big quarrel has to be settled, then the voice of the mother is the final voice. You can find plenty of examples of this in the literature—an excellent one is in Miss Lyster's exquisite book—but they have never been given their proper interpretation. And for this reason—we have all been bemused by the swagger of the Romani men. The Romani man is so very much the master, so very proud of himself. It is easy, even when one has learnt to discount much of the swagger, to be taken in. There is no speech anywhere in the world so assertively masculine as that of the true Romani man. But what the Romano says and what he means are very different. The Romano scarcely ever says what is in his heart. He usually says that which is not. And so, though a great many gorgios have written most understandingly about the Romano, have known a great deal about him, very very few have written understandingly about Romani women, and no gorgio has yet understood a Romani woman—not even Francis Hindes Groome, who married one.

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## VII

### FORTUNE-TELLING

*"Witches, warlocks and gypsies know ae the ither."*—

OLD SCOTS SAYING.

THERE is an old rhyme about the Gypsies coming to town which ends :

And for every Gypsy woman old  
A maiden's fortune will be told.

Gypsies and fortune-telling ; the words go together in the mind of the gorgio. Of course nobody admits belief in what the Gypsy woman foretells. We are now an educated people and above such foolish things. Superstition—except among the poorer country folk who live too close to the soil and the elements to be anything but superstitious—is out of fashion in Britain to-day. Indeed I am frequently astonished at the vehemence with which people (almost always townspeople) will deny holding even such age-old and simple luck superstitions as bowing to the new moon or stroking a black cat, while belief in the supernatural is either laughed at or hotly denied. Yet large numbers of these very townspeople attend spiritualist meetings that are conducted by fake mediums and are not in the least deterred when their medium is exposed in the courts. And still larger numbers—thousands upon thousands, and again mainly townspeople, hard, material folk—turn first in their newspapers to the horoscopes. Men who forecast the course of the war by the aid of the stars and published their findings in the Sunday Press were more implicitly believed than the General Staff, nor did really bad blunders shake the faith of their followers. A paper devoted entirely to forecasting the future has a large circulation, and a visit to any bazaar should be sufficient to convince anybody of the hold the astrology racket has on this country. And still the Gypsy women tell fortunes as

they trade from door to door, nor do they appear to experience much difficulty in obtaining clients.

For as far back as we have any knowledge of the Gypsies they have been fortune-tellers. They have done more than any race on earth to spread belief in fortune-telling, in sorcery, in magical and sympathetic cures. Their women have always pretended to possess occult powers. And there can be no doubt at all that they have, by the exercise of their wits and much practice, acquired considerable skill in the art of reading character and even thought which, though it is more often than not allied to deceit, is yet in some measure true in itself. And it must be remembered that deceit and imposture alone could never have built up and supported a practice that has withstood the passage of centuries and the constant attacks of progress. There must also be some truth.

There are many forms of fortune-telling practised among Gypsies. Most are undoubtedly simply forms of deceit. Darklis Lee, talking to Miss Lyster of *dukkeriben*, said: "I only tells them a lot of *hokibens*. Now my sister can *dukker* proper. My sister was my mother's seventh daughter. She can make and unmake luck. Seventh daughters can see more nor we can." There is not a Gypsy woman living who will not tell you "a lot of *hokibens*" if you give her a chance. Ninety-nine per cent. of the "cross my hand with silver, pretty lady," is of this class, and it includes all the casual fortune-telling during door to door trade. Yet even in this casual trade the ability to read character, and sometimes thought, is astonishing. But it is not so uncanny as it might appear. Our characters are writ larger on our faces than we realise, and to those who live by their wits, are descended from generations of ancestors who lived by their wits and practised this very trade at the expense of the gorgio, and who make a habit (even though unconsciously) of studying faces as part of the daily business of life, our characters are sometimes dreadfully plain. It is never the palm of the hand (though the hand will often betray the calling of the

owner) that is read, but the mouth and the eyes of the face behind it. Nor is the reading of thoughts so uncanny as it might seem. Life is pretty much the same for all human beings so far as desires are concerned. The range of thought and desire in the vast majority of men and women, and particularly young men and women, is very narrow. Indeed Leland, who was the first President of the Gypsy Lore Society, went so far as to list fourteen basic rules for fortune-telling. I give them here :

1. It is safe in most cases with middle-aged men to declare that they have had a lawsuit, or a great dispute as to property, which has given them a great deal of trouble. This must be impressively uttered. Emphasis and sinking the voice are of great assistance in fortune-telling. If the subject betray the least emotion, or admit it, promptly improve the occasion, express sympathy, and "work it up."

2. Declare that a great fortune, or something greatly to the advantage of the subject, or something which will gratify him, will soon come in his way, but that he must be keen to watch his opportunity and be bold and energetic.

3. He will have three great chances, or fortunes, in his life. If you *know* that he has inherited or made a fortune, or had a good appointment, you may say that he has already realised one of them. This seldom fails.

4. A lady of great wealth and beauty, who is of singularly sympathetic disposition, is in love with him, or ready to be, and it will depend on himself to secure his happiness. Or he will soon meet such a person when he shall least expect it.

5. "You had at one time great troubles with your relations (or friends). They treated you very unkindly." Or "They were prepared to do so, but your resolute conduct daunted them."

6. "You have been three times in great danger of death." Pronounce this very impressively. Everybody,

though it be a schoolboy, believes, or likes to believe, that he has encountered perils. This is infallible, or at least it takes in most people. If the subject can be induced to relate his hairbreadth escapes, you may foretell future perils.

7. "You have had an enemy who has caused you great trouble. But he, or she, it is well not to specify which till you find out the sex—will ere long go too far, and his or her effort to injure you will recoil on him or her." Or, briefly, "It is written that someone, by trying to wrong you, will incur terrible retribution." Or, "You have had enemies, but they are all destined to come to grief." Or, "You had an enemy but you outlived him."

8. "You got yourself once into great trouble by doing a good act.

9. "Your passions have thrice got you into great trouble. Once your inconsiderate anger (or pursuit of pleasure) involved you in great suffering which, in the end, was to your advantage." Or else, "This will come to pass : therefore be on your guard."

10. "You will soon meet with a person who will have a great influence on your future life if you cultivate his friendship. You will ere long meet someone who will fall in love with you if encouraged."

11. "You will find something very valuable if you keep your eyes open and watch closely. You have twice passed over a treasure and missed it, but you will have a third opportunity."

12. "You have done a great deal of good, or made the fortune or prosperity of persons who have been very ungrateful."

13. "You have been involved in several love affairs, but your conduct in all was really perfectly blameless."

14. "You have great capacity for something, and before long an occasion will present itself for you to exert it to your advantage."

Obviously Leland over-simplified the business. But even with his fourteen rules (and it is easy to think of another half-dozen that would be useful, to say the least of it) or rather a combination of some of them varied to suit the client, a convincing case could be made out by the veriest novice. How much more convincing then when the teller is dark, with compelling eyes and impressive voice, with arresting gesture and strange dress. And how much more convincing still when to those distinct assets are added a little intuition and a great ability to decipher the character that is written on all our faces. Little wonder that the Gypsy woman going from door to door on her hawking rounds has some success with fortune-telling. She must often hit upon the truth, and if she does her fame will soon spread. But, though there may be and very often is more than a grain of truth in this type of fortune-telling, it remains very largely a form of deceit, an easy way of picking up a little cash. It is a second string to the Gypsy bow, a useful adjunct to the hawking, and it is not regarded as any more than that by those that practise it.

To this class of fortune-telling belongs also the use of cards. Nowadays cards are not used in this connection very widely by British Gypsies (though I have known them used more than once), but time was when a special pack was used for this purpose. This is the *Tarot*. It is still used by some Gypsies in Hungary and Eastern Europe, and no doubt elsewhere, but I have never seen it used by British Gypsies, though I have known British Gypsies who knew some of the symbols. I have, however, seen it used in England and have, in fact, had my fortune told by means of it. This was in London in 1933, in Old Compton Street, where for a short time some Greek Gypsies rented a shop and did a pretty good business as phrenologists, fortune-tellers and, I suspect, one or two other things. It was not a very satisfactory or convincing exhibition of fortune-telling. The woman who did it got a good deal of my past life correct and did not make a bad guess at one or two of my thoughts and hopes (any door to door *diddikai* hawk-



ing Woolworth goods would have been as accurate I have no doubt), but in general she was pretty wide of the mark and my knowledge of a little Romani obviously unsettled her. She would not let me handle the cards, and did not herself appear to know much about them, but then nobody does know very much about them, though plenty of people have put forward any number of ideas.

The woman set out the cards in exactly the manner described by Mathers as long ago as 1888 and which, no doubt, she had learned by rote in her youth, but her reading of them, or rather her pretence of reading them, was not in the least convincing. She knew the purpose of the cards, and the manner in which they should be used, but she did not fully understand (or perhaps she was not trying) their meaning. She relied on reading my face. But then she was telling me a lot of *hokibens*.

Most Gypsy fortune-telling is just that—a lot of *hokibens*: an easy way of picking up cash from the gullible gorgio. It is used, however, as a cover for many things. There is more than one picture of a Gypsy woman reading the palm of a client, the while some other Gypsy (generally a child) picks the unfortunate pigeon's pocket. That practice is, perhaps, more frequent than one realises. I have, for example, had it tried on me on Epsom Downs on Derby Day. The youngster got nothing, for the simple reason that my approachable pockets rarely contain anything but scraps of paper, string and similar unmarketable oddments. But it is also used to cover bigger operations than picking pockets or petty pilfering. It is used, or rather was used (for I have not heard of the trick being practised in Britain of recent years), to cover the larger sort of fraud, in particular as a cover for, or a means of approach to, the *hokano baro*, the great trick. There are many forms of the *hokano baro*, but in essence they are all the same. It is the confidence trick. Whenever we read about the confidence trick it seems just too obvious for words, and we are always surprised that anybody can get taken in. Yet many a hardheaded business man has been defrauded

by means of it, and it is practised regularly and frequently, and successfully, in every big city of the world. So with the *hokano baro*; described in cold print it seems altogether too obvious and we cannot believe that anybody could be so foolish as to get taken in. Cold print makes no allowance for the mystery, the fascination, the compelling eyes and the insidious hypnotic voice; no allowance for the natural gullibility of man; no allowance for the particular circumstances (they are never revealed anyway) that prompted the Gypsy to work the trick on that particular dupe. (We have, too, no right or reason to feel superior about those that are duped. Whole nations—our own included—have fallen for much the same sort of thing recently.)

*Hokano baro* is practised all over the world, with modifications to suit the country, and has been described by almost every writer on the Gypsies. In its standardised form it consists of three parts. Firstly, getting into the house of the dupe, or, if that is not essential, into his or her confidence (this is generally achieved by fortune-telling, but it may be done by means of offering cheap goods for sale or even by plain begging.) Secondly, the removal of the property. Thirdly, the binding of the victim by oath not to say anything about it for three or more weeks. Leland gives an imaginary example of the technique, which rings, I think, remarkably true. "The feat . . . is performed by inducing some woman of largely magnified faith to believe that there is hidden in her house a magic treasure, which can only be made 'to come to hand' by depositing in the cellar another treasure, to which it will come by natural affinity and attraction. 'For gold, as you see, draws gold, my deari, and so if you ties up all your money in a pocket-handkerchief, an' leaves it, you'll find it doubled. An' wasn't there the Squire's lady—you know Mrs. Trefarlo, of course—and didn't she draw two hundred old gold guineas out of the ground where they'd laid in an old grave—and only one guinea she gave me for all my trouble; an' I hope you'll do better than that for the poor old Gypsy, my deari——.' The gold and the spoons are

all tied up—for, as the enchantress sagely observes, ‘there may be silver too’—and she solemnly repeats over it magical rhymes, while the children, standing around in awe, listen to every word. It is a good subject for a picture. Sometimes the windows are closed, and candles lighted—to add to the effect. The bundle is left or buried in a certain place. The next day the Gypsy comes and sees how the charm is working. Could anyone look under her cloak, he might find another bundle precisely resembling the one containing the treasure. She looks at the precious deposit, repeats her rhyme again solemnly and departs, after charging the housewife that the bundle must not be touched, looked at or spoken of for three weeks. ‘Every word you tell about it, my deari, will be a guinea gone away.’ Sometimes she exacts an oath on the Bible, when she *chive o manzin apre tatti*—that nothing shall be said. . . . After three weeks another *Extraordinary Instance of Gross Credulity* appears in the country papers, and is perhaps repeated in a colossal London daily, with a reference to the absence of the schoolmaster. There is wailing and shame in the house—perhaps great suffering—for it may be that the savings of years, and bequeathed tankards, and marriage rings, and inherited jewellery, and mother’s sovereigns have been swept away. The charm has worked.”

That was written in 1890. I think Leland’s Gypsy has altogether too grammatical a command of the English language, but some such scene as that described has, I am sure, happened many times in England in the past. The technique in Germany was but little different. Liebich, in his *Die Zigeuner*, published in 1863, says: “When a Gypsy has found some old peasant who has the reputation of being rich or very well-to-do he sets himself to work with utmost care to learn the disposition of his man with every possible detail as to his house and habits. And so some day, when all the rest of the family are in the fields, the Gypsy—man or woman—comes, and entering into a conversation, leads it to the subject of the house, remarking that it is a belief among his people that in it a treasure lies

buried. He offers, if he may have permission to take it away, to give one-fourth, a third or a half its value. This all seems fair enough, but the peasant is greedy and wants more. The Gypsy, on his side, also assumes suspicion and distrust. He proves that he is a conjuror by performing some strange tricks—thus he takes an egg from under a hen, breaks it, and apparently brings out a small human skull or some strange object, and finally persuades the peasant to collect all his coin and other valuables in notes, gold and silver, into a bundle, cautioning him to hold them fast. He must go to bed and put the packet under his pillow, while he, the conjuror, finds the treasure. This done—probably in a darkened room—he takes a bundle of similar appearance which he has quickly prepared, and, under pretence of facilitating the operation and putting the man into a proper position, takes the original package and substitutes another. Then the victim is cautioned that it is of the utmost importance for him to lie perfectly still.” The technique, it will be seen, is very much the same.

The last recorded example of *hokano baro* that I know occurred as recently as 1937, but I suspect that a good many others, not recorded because the victim has been afraid to face the publicity, have occurred, just as many examples of the success of the gorgio confidence trick are never brought to light. The Gypsy, of course, uses his or her power of voice and eye and the astonishing quickness of hand with which the whole race is gifted to cover many forms of fraud, but these do not come under the heading of *hokano baro*, which must always be allied to some tale of the future or of prophetic vision into the past. Ringing the changes, Lord John Russell, and so forth are quite definitely in another category. But I am not so sure about an instance that occurred in Cardiff as recently as 1933. This was when a “Greek” Gypsy, named George Stirio, got into conversation with a commercial traveller in a café, talked to him with such lightning rapidity in Romani mixed with English that he reduced him to a sort of stupor and got him to hand over his wallet, which contained £36.

The Gypsy made some pretence of telling the man's fortune, handed him back the notes, and left the café. When the commercial traveller recovered sufficiently to count his money he found that £17 was missing. Stirio got six months hard labour for this feat. This is obviously not true *hokano baro*, but it springs I fancy from the same root. Earlier in the same year in South Wales another foreign Gypsy, a woman of huge height and no small girth, did well in the big stores under guise of fortune-telling, extracting money from men ; but here I fancy a mixture of intimidation and plain bustling occurred. There was a huge Gypsy woman in the New Forest in 1936 and again in 1938, and I have heard that she was in Cornwall in 1939. I saw her twice and she must have been nearer seven than six feet in height, and her weight around twenty stones. She was a "Greek," though she said she was born in Blackpool in the 'nineties. She certainly knew a great deal about horses, but her method of living was to get talking to some man in as public a place as possible, choosing a well-dressed man, and then by a mixture of begging and fortune-telling to make him feel too conspicuous, thus forcing money from him to get rid of her.

But when all the many forms of deception in the guise of fortune-telling have been taken into account there yet remains a considerable residue that is absolutely honest and uncannily accurate, and which can be explained, I think, only by postulating the gift of "second sight" in the tellers. Nowadays there is no belief among the majority of people in the fact of second sight. Plenty of people believe wholeheartedly in the ability of certain journalists to foretell the future because of their intimacy with the stars ; plenty of people believe wholeheartedly that one of the ancient Hebrew poets foresaw this present war and the course it would take ; plenty of people believe wholeheartedly in the prophecies of the Pyramids—indeed, I understand that there are some who order their whole lives by these prophecies. But very, very few of these people would credit any modern human being with the

gift of second sight. Yet second sight is a fact that may not be gainsaid. It is a form of involuntary prophetic vision, either direct or symbolical. Its existence has been acknowledged almost from the time man began to record events. Mention of it, though not under this name, occurs in the *Odyssey*; occurrences of it are frequently recorded in Ancient Hebrew literature, it is mentioned in the *Argonautica* of Apollonais Rhodius, and in several of the Icelandic sagas, particularly in *Njala*. It is not a gift confined to any one people. Lapps and Red Indians, Zulus and Maoris have given proof of it to explorers and travellers and these things have been duly recorded. Eskimos, Hungarians, Russians, Spaniards, Arabs—all these people have instances of it. But, nowadays at any rate, it seems to be connected mainly—but this is due, of course, not to any especial physical or spiritual condition so much as to proximity—with Celtic peoples, with the Celts of Scotland, Ireland and Wales, and especially of Scotland and Western Ireland, the wild and mountainous regions. It was first recorded for Scotland by Ranulf Higden in his fourteenth-century *Polychronicon*, and the Rev. Kirk in his *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fawns and Fairies*, originally published in 1691, has much more to say about it. It has never been common among the English, indeed it has always been so rare that those unfortunate enough to be so gifted have generally come to a sudden and sad ending at the hands of their prosaic brethren. But for Scotland and Ireland and Wales there have been many very authenticated cases of prophetic vision, and no Highland Scot, no true Irishman, no Welshman, in fact no Celt would dream of denying its occurrence, its frequent occurrence, and certainly none would be so foolish as to laugh at it. I am myself a full-blooded Celt. I do not claim to have second sight, and am indeed very thankful that I am not so gifted, but I must confess that I do experience at times premonitions that have proved, both for myself and others, uncannily accurate.

That many Gypsy women have had this gift of second

sight is, I think, beyond all question. Among them (to take a recent example) was Urania Boswell. In particular, she was able to foretell danger and death, but her prophecies (for the majority of which there is exceedingly good testimony) went far beyond that. In 1897 she foretold that "Queen Victoria would see the leaves fall four times before she went to her long rest"; that "the King who comes after her will die long before my turn comes"; that "after that the world will change—not all at once, but we'll live to see strange things, you and I. Men will fly like birds, and swim under the water in boats shaped like fishes. They'll sit by their own firesides and listen to voices and music a thousand miles away, same as if it was in the room." Do you remember Mother Shipton's famous prophecy?

Carriages without horses shall go,  
And accidents fill the world with woe :  
Iron on the water shall float  
As easily as a wooden boat,

and so on. Reni, with her foreknowledge of aeroplanes, submarines and wireless, at least deserves to rank with Mother Shipton. And, further, at Henley Regatta she warned Mr. Vanderbilt most urgently not to sail in the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*, which was then being built. In the following April the ship struck an iceberg and Vanderbilt and 1,502 other people were drowned. The Rev. D. M. M. Bartlett mentions three prophecies concerning her own family. In April she predicted that her son Levi would not live longer than the following February. He was buried on February 2nd at Bromley, Kent. She predicted correctly to the day the deaths of others also, including her brother's wife's brother. Just before her death in 1933 she foresaw the death of her brother Job in March, 1936, and on the Saturday before she herself died she said: "On the third day from now I shall die and on that day it will rain." She died, and it did. On the day previously she said that the missel-thrush would sing before her death. One perched in a tree close to the *vardo* and

sang all Saturday. When she died it left. And actually in 1924 she said of herself: "I shall die in nine years and it will be cold." Again she did, and it was.

Urania Boswell told my fortune in 1928. I do not propose to set it all forth here—in any case it is not yet completed—but I can say, in all honesty, that so far at least it has all come true. Furthermore, some of the things she saw in 1928 seemed then to me to be utterly fantastic; so much so that I remember laughing and her reply, "You will see, young man." Is it any wonder that I believe in the gift of second sight in Gypsy women?

I have since, by the way, had my fortune told, spontaneously and without payment, by a young Gypsy woman. The two fortunes agree in almost every particular.



## VIII

### GYPSY MEDICINE

GYPSIES very rarely call in a doctor. They have to do so for a death nowadays, since the death cannot be registered without a doctor's certificate, and perhaps they use a doctor's services for a birth more frequently than they used to do, but for ordinary illness and ailments, for which the gorgio would summon medical assistance, they still rely for the most part upon their own knowledge or the knowledge of the old women among them. Gypsies all over the world, and English Gypsies are no exceptions, have always had a great reputation as healers ; nor is that reputation dead in the English countryside to-day. I know an old Gypsy woman, who travels Dorset and Hampshire, whose fame as a curer of warts is enormous—and deserved.

It is almost always the Gypsy woman who is the doctor, and she is usually a chemist as well. She has at her fingers' tips knowledge of remedies and prescriptions she learnt from her mother, her grandmother, her great-grandmother. Preserved in these remedies is the knowledge and experience of hundreds of years, and they are very jealously guarded, and handed on to the daughters when they are about to become mothers themselves. The Gypsies' knowledge of herbal remedies is very great, as great perhaps as that possessed by the Benedictine monks in mediæval times, and I cannot pretend to give a complete list of all the plants used by them, much less a complete catalogue of all their medicines. I do not know them, nor indeed a tenth of them ; nor, I am sure, does any gorgio. But in any case, every Gypsy woman has private concoctions of her own, which she alone knows and employs. But there are certain plants which are widely known (many of them are used regularly in English folk herbals) and Thompson has made a list of some of the plants used by midland Gypsies. I have been making a list myself for the past

twenty years or so (collected rather aimlessly mainly from south and west country Gypsies, but with oddments from other parts of the country), and I think that the list I give here is the most complete yet published of the plants used by Gypsies. Where the plant occurs in Thompson's list I mention his name and the purpose for which he says it is used, adding information of my own only when it differs from his.

**ADDER'S TONGUE** (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), also called Snake's Tongue and Serpent's Tongue. Crushed and boiled in olive oil it is used as a dressing for open wounds.

Most Gypsies to whom I have mentioned this have denied knowledge of it, but I have had it given me by three old women in widely separated districts.

**AGARIC** (*Polyporus officinalis*), used in small doses as a cure for diarrhoea.

**AGRIMONY** (*Agrimonia Eupatoria*), also called Sticklewort, Stickwort and Lockleburrr, an infusion of leaves used to lower the temperature and cure coughs (Thompson). Very widely known as a cough cure, but I have not come across it being used to lower the temperature. One old woman told me it was good for the eyesight if poured into the eye.

**ALDER** (*Alnus glutinosa*), decoction of inner bark given for jaundice and ague (Thompson). I think this must be a concoction of the Derbyshire Boswells alone. I have come across it nowhere and can find it mentioned nowhere else.

**AVENS** (*Geum urbanum*), also called Clove Root, Colewort, Way Bennet, Wild Rye. The crushed root is used as a cure for diarrhoea, and a little in boiling water relieves sore throats.

**BARBERRY** (*Berberis vulgaris*), also called Holy Thorn. A weak infusion of the berries is good for kidney troubles.

**BETTONY** (*Stachys betonica*), the Wood Betony. An infusion of the leaves relieves stomach troubles: ointment made from juice of fresh leaves and unsalted lard removes the poison from stings and bites (Thompson).

**BINDWEED** (*Convolvulus arvensis*), the Lesser Bindweed.

An infusion of leaves or flowers expels worms (Thompson). Commonly used by Gypsies.

BISTORT (*Polygonum bistorta*), also called Adderswort, Easter Giant, Passion's Dock, Snakeward. A very common weed, particularly in the north, but I have only heard of its use once, when an old Gypsy woman (Martha Young) told me it was good for diphtheria.

BLACKBERRY (*Rubus fruticosus*), leaves smoked relieve internal inflammation and reduce fevers (Thompson).

BLADDER-CAMPION (*Silene cucubulus*), also called Round Campion and John's Plant, leaves applied externally as a poultice cure erysipelas (Thompson).

BLADDERWRACK (*Fuens vesiculosus*), also called Kelpware. The most familiar of our seaweeds. Used with hot water and sometimes in whisky as an embrocation. Very good for rheumatism.

BRACKEN (*Pteris aquilina*), decoction of sliced roots taken in wine expels worms (Thompson). Commonly used as a cure for constipation.

BROOKLIME (*Veronica beccabunga*), also called Water Pimpernel. The leaves are used for a poultice for piles, boils, etc.

BROOM (*Cytisus scoparius*), infusion of young shoots or leaves is good for kidney troubles (Thompson). One of the Grays also told Thompson that it expelled worms. Commonly used for kidney complaints by Gypsies.

BUCKBEAN (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), also called Marsh Trefoil and Bogbean, infusion of leaves remedies loss of appetite; purifies the blood (Thompson).

BUCKTHORN ALDER (*Rhamnus frangula*), also called Black Alder. The berries make a very powerful purgative. Once popular this is very rarely used nowadays. A decoction of the bark is used a good deal as a purgative, being mild in action.

BURDOCK (*Actium lappa*), also called Beggar's Burr, Cockle Buttons, Clote Burr, Fox's Cloth, Hardock, Lappa, Thorny Burr. Infusion of leaves or flowers, or better still of crushed seeds, relieves and will cure rheumatism

(Thompson). Commonly used as a cure for rheumatism. Some Gypsies carry the seeds in a little bag slung round the neck as a preventive of rheumatism.

CARROT (*Daucus corota*), this is the wild carrot common on chalk soil, also called Bee's Nest. An infusion of the leaves used for kidney troubles.

CELANDINE (*Chelidonium majus*), the juice is used as an outward application for corns and warts. It is very effective indeed.

CENTAURY (*Erythræa sentaurium*), also called Christ's Ladder, Fellwort, Feverwort, Ball-of-the-Earth. Infusion of leaves is good for jaundice (Thompson). The dried herb is used as a tea by many south country Gypsies and is regarded as a first-rate tonic, and very good for consumption.

CHAMOMILE (*Athemis nobilis*), also called Earth Apple, infusion of flowers or leaves cures flatulence (Thompson). Used as a tonic by many Gypsies and country women.

CHESTNUT (*Castanea vulgaris*), also called Sweet Chestnut. The powdered nuts are good for piles. Some Gypsies wear the nut in a little bag round their necks as a prevention of piles. The bag must never be made of silk.

CHICORY (*Cichorium intybus*), also called Wild Succory. A decoction of the root is good for jaundice.

CLIVERS (*Galium aperine*), also called Catchweed, Goosegrass, Love Man, Robin-run-by-the-Grass, Scratchweed. An infusion drunk very hot the last thing at night is the remedy for a cold in the head. It is also a very ancient remedy for cancer, but I have not met a Gypsy who remembered that.

COLTSFOOT (*Tussilago farfara*), also called Laughwort. Smoking dried leaves is beneficial for asthma and bronchitis, juice from fresh leaves is used in preparing ointment that heals ulcers, running sores and piles (Thompson). It is, of course, used largely in all herbal tobaccos. Drunk as a tea is good for curing coughs.

COMFREY (*Symphytum officinale*), also called Knitbone, Nipbone and Blackwort. Is used by many Gypsies to

bind broken bones, and was known in this connection as long ago as the time of Pliny.

COUCH GRASS (*Agropyrum repens*), also called Dog-grass, Twitch-grass. A decoction in cold water excellent for reducing temperatures. Also given for gall-stones.

COWSLIP (*Primula veris*), infusion of dried flowers allays convulsions and lowers temperature (Thompson).

CUCKOO-PINT (*Arum maculatum*), also called Wake Robin, decoction of finely-sliced roots, or infusion of dry powdered flowers, relieves croup and bronchitis; bruised leaves heal festering sores, gatherings and boils (Thomson).

DAISY (*Bellis perennis*), juice from roots mixed with juice from ginger roots cures toothache (Thompson). This, I think, must be another Boswell remedy only. I have been unable to trace its use anywhere else.

DANDELION (*Taraxacum officinale*), leaves eaten in spring salads to purify the blood: juice from roots an ingredient of medicine used to treat jaundice, dropsy, liver and kidney troubles generally (Thompson). The juice from the stem is excellent for treating warts.

DOCK (*Rumex*), any of the common kinds but particularly *R. obtusifolius*, decoction of sliced roots taken in elderberry wine dispels spring rash (Thompson).

ELDER (*Sambucus nigra*), infusion of flowers or leaves, or failing these of bark, is a certain remedy for colic, fermentation in the stomach and internal inflammation (Thompson). The elder has always been greatly valued by herbalists and country peoples generally. Every bit of it from roots to flowers has its uses, and in addition to these given by Thompson, I have found it used for rheumatism, strained eyes, neuralgia, toothache and boils. Not always an infusion of flowers or leaves, of course.

EYEBRIGHT (*Euphrasia officinalis*), also called Euphrasy. Infusion of leaves taken internally cures coughs; applied as a lotion it strengthens weak eyes and heals sore ones (Thompson). I have met Gypsies who smoked it mixed with Coltsfoot—and it is an ingredient of most herbal

tobaccos—maintaining that it cured asthma and catarrh. Is widely used by Gypsies for eye troubles.

FEVERFEW (*Chrysanthemum parthenium*), also called Batchelors' Buttons and Flirtwort. Belongs to the Chamomile family and is often used by Gypsies in place of Chamomile.

FOXGLOVE (*Digitalis purpurea*), ointment made from fresh leaves cures eczema ; very weak infusion of dried leaves allays fevers (Thompson). I have never found foxglove used for either purpose by Gypsies. I imagine this might be confined to a few midland families.

GENTIAN (*Gentiana campestris*), also called Baldmony and Felwort. An infusion of root and herb relieves heartburn and flatulence.

GOLDEN ROD (*Solidago virganrea*), also called Aaron's Rod ; infusion of leaves used for treating gravel and stone, ointment made from fresh leaves heals wounds and sores (Thompson).

GROUND IVY (*Nepeta glachoma*), also called Alehoof, Cat's Foot, Devil's Candlesticks, Hale House, Horseshone, Thunder Vine. Infusion of leaves is a strong tonic, will cure ulcerated stomach (Thompson). An infusion of the dried herb is excellent for coughs : used with wood sage and made into a tea is good for colds : an ointment from the stems mixed with chickweed is used for sprains.

GROUNDSEL (*Semecis vulgaris*). Bruised stems and leaves applied externally as a poultice relieve colic and inflammation (Thompson). Is used as a poultice for sprains by some families, but is not used generally by Gypsies.

HAWKWEED (*Hieracium pilosella*), also called Mouse-ear. Infusion of leaves allays convulsions (Thompson). This must be a family medicine of the Derbyshire Boswells. I have never heard of its use among Gypsies.

HEMLOCK (GIANT) (*Conium maculatum*). Ointment made from fresh leaves reduces neck swellings and heals sores and ulcers (Thompson). I have not heard of this among Gypsies and fancy it must be another private medicine of the Derbyshire Boswells.

**HENBANE (COMMON)** (*Hyosyamus nigt*). Very weak infusion of leaves is good for sharp pains in the head, spasms and sleeplessness : may be given with advantage to delirious patients (Thompson). Is commonly used as a cure for headaches and neuralgia by the Gypsies I know.

**HONEYSUCKLE** (*Lonicana periclymenum*), juice from berries cures sore throat and canker of the mouth : is used in an ointment for the treatment of ulcers, running sores and piles (Thompson). Juice from the berries is used for sore throat by Gypsies I know, but I have not come across it used in ointments.

**HOP** (*Humulus lupulus*), tops and flowers added in preparing medicine given to sufferers from jaundice, dropsy or liver or kidney complaints (Thompson). An ounce of hops to a pint of boiling water taken some time before meals is a good cure for loss of appetite. A poultice of the tops will relieve sciatica or lumbago. An infusion of the flowers will cure worms in children. Put hops into a muslin bag and use the bag as a pillow and you will cure insomnia.

**HOREHOUND** (*Marrubiam vulgare*), also called Madweed. An infusion of leaves cures coughs and colds : is a good tonic (Thompson).

**HOREHOUND (BLACK)** (*Ballota nigra*), also called Madweed, Gypsy Wort. Used as a tea is good for asthma and bronchitis. A good laxative for children.

**JUNIPER** (*Juniperus communis*). The juice of the berries in hot water is good for flatulence. The berries eaten by a person fasting will cure stones : ten berries a day for ten days is the treatment I was told.

**LIME** (*Tilia europæa*). Infusion of flowers allays convulsions : benefits those subject to epileptic fits (Thompson). Many Gypsies use it to cure biliousness.

**LINSEED** (*Linum usitatissimum*), also called Flax. Linseed tea drunk throughout pregnancy will ensure an easy birth.

**LOOSESTRIFE (YELLOW)** (*Lysimachia vulgaris*). Infusion of leaves cures diarrhoea (Thompson). I think another Derbyshire Boswell family medicine.

MARSH MALLOW (*Althæa officinalis*), also called Wild Geranium. Bruised leaves heal sore eyes and neutralise the effect of stings and bites : infusion of leaves or sliced roots, with paregoric added, cures sore throats, coughs and colds (Thompson). Ointment made from crushed roots good for sore feet and varicose veins : a hot poultice of the leaves good for toothache.

MEADOW-SAFFRON (*Colchicum autumnale*). A very weak infusion of sliced roots is good for dropsy and gout (Thompson). This is a common Gypsy remedy for gout.

MEADOW-SWEET (*Spirea almaria*). Infusion of flowers or leaves allays internal inflammation : stimulates sluggish kidneys (Thompson).

MILKWORT (*Polygala vulgaris*). Decoction of sliced roots cures inflammation of the lungs (Thompson). I have not come across this.

MISTLETOE (*Viscum album*). Juice of berries much diluted, or infusion of leaves, benefits sufferers from epilepsy and St. Vitus's Dance (Thompson). I have only heard of the berries being used.

MOUSE-EAR CHICKWEED (*Cerestium vulgatum*), also called Robin-under-the-Hedge. Infusion of leaves cures coughs and colds (Thompson). This information was obtained from a Lock. I think it must be a private remedy.

NETTLE (*Urtica dioica*). The common stinging nettle. Nettle tea clears the blood and is a good tonic : infusion of the seeds is good for consumptives : infusion of the leaves is beneficial to goitre.

PARSLEY (*Petroselinum sativum*). Leaves used in preparing medicine for the treatment of dropsy, jaundice and kidney and liver troubles (Thompson).

PARSLEY PIERT (*Alchemilla arvensis*), also called Home Wort. Infusion of the dried herb is good for gravel and other bladder troubles.

PELLITORY-OF-THE-WALL (*Parietaria officinalis*). Juice from leaves is an ingredient of ointment that cures ulcers, running sores and piles (Thompson). Infusion of the leaves allays all bladder troubles : infusion of leaves and



wild carrot is good for dropsy : ointment made from crushed roots is good for piles.

PENNYROYAL (*Mentha pulegium*), also called Hop Marjoram, Pudding Brass, Run-by-the-Ground. Infusion of leaves allays spasms (Thompson). Used as a tea is good for chills and colds : juice of the herb rubbed on the skin prevents bites from insects.

PEPPERMINT (*Mentha piperita*), also called Brandy Mint. Used as a tea is excellent for headaches : a drop of the juice on an aching tooth will relieve the pain.

PILEWORT (*Ranunculus flearia*), also called Lesser Celandine. The common country remedy for piles, hence the popular name. The usual Gypsy remedy for the same complaint (I have been assured by more than one Gypsy that by merely carrying a sprig or two in one's pocket a complete cure may be effected) being used as an ointment ; an infusion taken four times a day for four days will effect a cure.

PLANTAIN (*Plantago major*), also called Ripple Grass, Way Bread. Bruised leaves stop bleeding and heal cuts (Thompson). This is the common Gypsy use for the plant : infusion of leaves is good for internal hæmorrhages (Thompson). This does not appear to be a usual Gypsy remedy, but most Gypsies seem to have heard of it. The leaves soaked in hot water and bound round a finger will quickly cure a whitlow or any other gathering. It does not seem to be generally known that the leaves of the plantain are every whit as good as, and personally I think better than, the leaves of the dock for relieving stings by nettles. The Gaelic word for plantain is *slanlus*, which means " the healing plant." Arigho has told me that to eat the root is a cure for adder bites.

POLYPODY (*Polypodium vulgare*), also called Adder's Tongue, Oak Fern, Wall Fern, Rock Polypody. The crushed root used as a poultice and applied to the seat of the pain is a good remedy for rheumatism. An old country name for the plant is Rheum-purging Polypody, which indicates that its properties have long been known to a wider circle. The name has long since died out.

SAINT JOHN'S WORT (*Hypericum perforatum*), also called Amber, Blessed, Hundred Holes. Is used by many Gypsies as a hairdressing, makes the hair grow. Infusion is good for catarrh: ointment excellent for deep cuts, sprains and burns.

SCABIOUS (*Scabious arvensis*). Infusion of leaves strengthens the lungs and will cure pleurisy (Thompson). Unknown to all Gypsies I know, but known to my tinker friend.

SCURVY-GRASS (*Cochlearia officinalis*) The fresh leaves eaten untreated are good for all skin complaints.

SHEPHERD'S PURSE (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), also called Case Weed, Pick Purse, St. James's Wort. Infusion of leaves an ingredient of medicine used in the treatment of dropsy, jaundice and kidney and liver complaints (Thompson). Used as an ointment is good for erysipelas.

SOAPWORT (*Saponaria officinalis*), also called Fuller's Herb. A decoction of the root applied to a bruise or a black eye will quickly get rid of the discoloration: slices of the freshly dug root laid on the place have the same effect but are slower in action.

SOLOMON'S SEAL (*Polygonatum multiflorum*), also called Jacob's Ladder, Seal Wort, Our Lady's Seal. An ointment made from the leaves and applied to a bruise or a black eye will quickly get rid of the discoloration.

TANSY (*Tanacetum vulgare*), also called Buttons. Infusion of the flowers will expel worms: hot fomentations of the herb good for gout; if you wear a sprig of tansy inside your boots you will never get the ague. (This is also an old Hampshire farm labourers' superstition.) Thompson gives the same uses for tansy as he does for shepherd's purse.

THYME (WILD) (*Thymus serpyllum*). Gypsies regard this plant as very unlucky and will not bring it into their waggons or tents. But it may be used out of doors as a cure for whooping cough, boiled in water with a little sugar added and drunk cold.

TORMENTIL (*Potentilla tormentilla*). Infusion of leaves

cures diarrhœa (Thompson). Decoction of roots will stop internal hæmorrhage.

TRAVELLER'S JOY (*Clematis vitalba*). Infusion of leaves is good for rheumatism (Thompson).

VIOLET (*Viola odorata*). A poultice of the leaves steeped in boiling water is good for cancerous growths : an infusion of the leaves will aid internal cancers and, I have been told, will even cure them.

WOOD SAGE (*Tenerium scorodonia*), also called Hind Heal, Dittany. Infusion of the leaves relieves fever.

Most Gypsies seem to have a preference for simples. Some, however, do produce medicines into which are introduced all sorts of ingredients. Thompson knew a female Boswell (of the Derbyshire family) who was an adept at this, and he gives one or two very interesting recipes she used. For example, the ointment she used for ulcers, running sores and piles was made by mixing goose fat or pig's fat with juice extracted from pellitory-of-the-wall and coltsfoot leaves, and from honeysuckle berries. For dropsy, jaundice and kidney and liver troubles generally she made up a medicine that included shepherd's purse and tansy leaves, dandelion roots, parsley, hops and caraway seeds. For a cold she recommended a medicine which included a pennyworth (pre-1914 values) each of oil of peppermint, aniseed, paregoric, antimonial wine, tincture of opium and black treacle, together with sugar and added to a quart of boiling water. I have never come across a Gypsy who was a chemist to this extent, though Fanny Barney was pretty thorough in her methods, I am told : she, however, died before I really began to take an interest in Gypsy medicine. I have come across pig's fat being used on several occasions, and on several more the flesh of frogs. One old Gypsy woman of my acquaintance—a woman who could cure warts apparently by the simple process of wishing them away—used frog's flesh in an ointment she compounded for curing piles, and the skin of a frog was dropped into more than one of the concoctions she recommended as a drink. She was also credited, but I

could never find any evidence in support of the suggestion, with using dor-beetles crushed and mixed with root of avens as a cure for diarrhoea. But most of the Gypsies I have known have stuck stoutly to simples.

Gypsies regard all fungi with suspicion. They eat the giant puff-ball (*Hycoperdon borista*) fried in dripping and garnished with herbs and onions. I have eaten this and found it very good indeed, though it is regarded as rather poor fare by Gypsies. Perhaps the novelty appealed to me. They use the puff-ball in its dry state for staunching wounds—it makes a very good styptic—and also another fungus (*Polyporus igniarius*) which is sometimes called touchwood. But, generally speaking, Gypsies will not have anything to do with fungi, certainly not with those that grow in woods, and only occasionally have I found men who would eat even such well-known open varieties as the fair-ring mushroom (*Agaricus oreades*) and the blue-legs (*Agaricus personatus*). This is because so many fungi are poisonous, of course, and the Gypsy knows well, or at any rate used to know well, the uses of some of them as poisons.

Further to the remedies I have given here there are symbolic remedies. A Gypsy woman in the New Forest once assured me that the best way to get rid of warts was to catch a big black slug and impale it on a thorn bush; as the slug died the wart would shrivel, and when the slug was dead the wart would fall off. Thompson records that a Gypsy troubled with ague caught a spider and put it into a little bag made of silk which he wore round his neck, and as the spider died the ague left him. Many other examples of this could be given, and of course there are also the charms to keep away illness. Tansy in the boots is one, a sprig of gorse in the pocket will keep away all fevers, the skin of a frog or an eel carried anywhere about one will prevent rheumatism and keep the bearer supple, and so on. But these things are not properly worth a place in an account of Gypsy medicine. And then there is the cure without any apparent treatment. This can only be done to others, never to oneself, and unbelievable as it

sounds it does occur. There is an old Gypsy woman who travels Dorset and Hampshire who can get rid of warts in this way. I have heard of her doing so on three occasions and have talked to one of the men she cured. He had hands covered in warts (his friends supported this statement: never seen worse hands, they said) and he could not get rid of them though he had tried all the usual methods. Someone told him about the Gypsy, and he went to see her. He put on his Sunday best to do so, though he cannot explain why. She held his hands for a moment and looked at them, and then told him to go away. Very disappointed, he said that he had hoped she would do something for him; she replied that she would be back in a fortnight and he could come and see her then. In a fortnight his warts had gone, and he has not had a wart since. The woman would take no money and would not discuss the matter at all. I do not pretend to be able to explain this sort of thing: I do not pretend to understand it. I give the facts. There is perhaps a better name for it than medicine.

In addition to having some skill as doctors for human ailments, Gypsies have a considerable reputation as animal doctors and particularly for the doctoring of horses. All British Gypsies are interested in horses and most of them know something about doctoring animals, while some have an enormous knowledge and skill. The best horse doctor that I have known was a Stanley, though Arigho knew a good deal, and I give some of their remedies here, together with some collected by Thompson.

**BROKEN-WIND** (this is the common name for asthma in horses). Thompson got information on this from two Gypsies, a Lock and a Smith. The former advocated wood tar and aniseed, wood tar and treacle, or a mixture of the three; the latter maintained that balls made from lard and saltpetre were as good as anything else. Lock also recommended an infusion of shag or twist tobacco, one and a half pints of boiling water to an ounce of tobacco. He had another remedy, which he told Thompson was a

very old remedy and was a certain cure for mares, though it might be dangerous to horses, for it might kill them if it failed to cure. This is an oil obtained by placing the entrails of a freshly-killed chicken or other young fowl in a bottle, and decomposing them out of contact with air by sealing the bottle up and then burying it in a warm midden for a fortnight or so. Stanley's remedy was wood tar and aniseed, and he never used or recommended anything else. Arigho favoured the same mixture. Neither of them had heard of the use of tobacco, but I have known other Gypsies who do use it. Stanley knew the old remedy mentioned by Lock and also regarded it as a cure for mares but very dangerous for horses, but he believed that you should only use young cockerels. Broken-wind is regarded by veterinary science as incurable. Stanley maintained that though he had never cured it he had so greatly lessened the inconvenience of the condition that the animal was to all intents and purposes cured. He strongly held that a broken-winded horse should never, no matter what the weather, be brought indoors.

**BOG SPAVIN.** This is a condition found most frequently in cart horses, and Clydesdales for some reason appear to be particularly addicted to it. It seems to occur generally in young horses that have been forced or overfed. Stanley, who had a considerable unofficial practice among farmers, recommended leaves of the common nettle boiled in water and applied as hot as possible if any lameness was present. If no lameness is evident he applied a good dressing of green tar.

**COLIC.** Thompson has information from two Gypsies, a Smith and a Wharton, and from a potter family. The Smith remedy is a draught of warm ale containing sweet spirits of nitre and a little laudanum, the horse being well wrapped afterwards and kept without food for some time. Wharton favoured oil of turpentine and ground ginger made into balls with flour or meal. The potters believed in a purge of aloes and soap, to be followed by a dose of fennel oil in weak spirits. Stanley would have nothing to

do with the laudanum, which, he declared, "don't do nothin' but hide it." His remedy is turpentine in linseed oil—two ounces of turpentine to one pint of oil—to be followed in a quarter of an hour by a quart of warm beer.

COUGHS. Stanley gave black treacle in warm water. But he would say "a *grai* don't cough : cough is simtims, *rai*," and he would look for the cause.

CRACKED HEELS. Thompson calls this complaint Greasy-Heels, a Gypsy mishearing, I have always thought, of the common Grapy Heels, but it occurs, I think, in the *English Dialect Dictionary*. His information comes from the same Smith, who once cured an old and heavy-legged horse by poulticing with linseed until the discharge ceased, then washing with a solution of alum and copperas (green vitriol or crystallised ferrous sulphate) in order to clean and harden the wounds and the flesh around them, and finally by applying wood tar and some healing ointment. Sometimes with cracked heels there is fever, and for this Stanley gave a very strong infusion of agrimony leaves. He, too, poulticed with linseed, but he would never wash, using a wisp of hay to rub very gently any dirt away and afterwards applying an ointment he made from marsh mallow.

MANGE. Thompson's Smith believed that a cure could be effected by the external application of a salve made from lard, flowers of sulphur, and either snuff or powdered tobacco, and by dosing the animal every two or three days with "livers of antimony." Stanley recognised (perfectly correctly) three sorts of mange which he called mange, head and tail mange, and leg mange. He knew it was a condition caused by parasites—crabs he called them—and he knew that it was necessary not only to kill the adults but also the young after they had hatched and before they could lay eggs themselves. He used sulphur and lime in water (I am afraid I do not know the quantities, for I cannot find the note I made at the time) and he advised applications at intervals of five days. Four applications were generally sufficient.

**QUITTOR.** This is a disease of the foot that is most painful and can be very troublesome. It generally follows an injury to the foot. Among country horses it is uncommon, though I have seen it more than once, but I believe it is fairly common in towns. Stanley had a story that forty years or so ago, sometime in the 'nineties, when he was a young man, he was called in to look at two horses belonging to the railway company in a neighbouring town. The local veterinaries had been unable to do anything for them apparently, and someone had said that young Stanley was good with horses. (By the way, he called this disease Gitts or Gitters, the "g" being hard as in gold.) He was immensely proud of the fact that he had both horses working again very soon. His treatment was bread poultices applied cold, followed by a poultice of bruised plantain leaves, and liberal applications of cold water. He then used his marsh mallow ointment (when the inflammation had gone) and by continual applications of this got the animals back into working condition.

**SPRAINS and SORES.** Thompson says that one of the Herons used a liniment for sprains that contained methylated spirits, oil of turpentine and camphor; and that one of the Boswells preferred to use marsh mallow ointment for all simple abrasions of the skin and slight wounds. Stanley also believed in methylated, oil of turpentine and camphor, and also used marsh mallow ointment (a great favourite of his for all sorts of things) for slight wounds. For burns and scalds he used carron oil.

**STAGGERS.** Thompson was told by one of the Locks that staggers is generally due to improper feeding having caused acute indigestion. He was perfectly right in that it is a stomach disorder, and his remedy of purging is in accord with the best veterinary practice. He used balls prepared from calomel, liquorice powder and treacle, and he would allow the animal no food and only warm water to drink for twelve hours. A Boswell remedy told to Thompson was balls made up of cream of tartar, ground ginger and castor oil. Stanley used liquorice powder,



ground ginger and castor oil in balls—a pretty powerful purgative I should say !—and would not allow the animal to eat for two days, but would give it all the warm water it required. Arigho used aloes and warm water. Amos Churen believed in liquorice powder, soap and black treacle. Neither would allow the animal anything to eat for a day, but both believed in plenty of warm water to drink.

**THRUSH.** (This is foot thrush : thrush in the mouth is called aptha.) Thompson was told by Lock that “ butter of antimony ” (antimony trichloride) should be used to remove dead or decaying matter from the diseased parts. For dry thrush he used a solution of sal-ammoniac or blue-stone (blue vitriol or crystallised copper sulphate). Thompson’s Smith recommended white vitriol for the same purpose. Stanley bathed with salt and water and afterwards dressed with his marsh mallow ointment mixed with charcoal, which he pressed into the bottom of the cleft with a stick.

**THROMBI.** Stanley called this disease “ various swellin’ ” and it took me a long time to identify it. It is not regarded as common in horses, but Stanley was evidently well acquainted with it, so it may be more common in Gypsy horses. It is a stopping of the blood vessels and comes, as a rule, after a horse has made a long, quick journey and is left standing to rest. On re-starting the animal is so lame in one of the hind legs that it can hardly move. The vein becomes varicosed and the leg swells. (Hence presumably “ various swellin’.”) I have never personally come across a case. Stanley, who was fond of talking about it when on the subject of horses, believed in making the animal eat if possible and giving it regular doses of turpentine and the juice from juniper berries. But the main cure is rest.

**WORMS.** Thompson’s Smith maintained that bay or laurel leaves, dried and powdered, and given at the rate of one a day in scalded bran, would almost always effect a cure within a fortnight or so. He was told by a Gray

that broom tops given in the same way were better, while his potter family would have nothing so mild and gave a "blue ball" two or three times a week, dosing with jalap between whiles. "Blue ball" is a composition containing quicksilver and is distinctly dangerous. Arigho, however, had the same idea as the potters. Stanley used broom tops in scalded bran.

The above is but a very short list of Gypsy remedies for ailments in horses. It would be possible to compile a very long list, for most Gypsies seem to have their own remedies for the various ailments common to horses, and those who fancy themselves as animal doctors also have remedies for ailments in cattle, pigs and sheep. There have been some very famous Gypsy animal doctors, and notably Constance Boss, who was the paternal grandmother of Borrow's Petulengro. Borrow maintained that she was 110 when she died. Thompson thinks this an exaggeration, but allows an age of 100 or thereabouts, believing that she was born about 1760 and died about 1860. She specialised as a bone-setter, and on one occasion begged a thoroughbred foal that had broken a foreleg and was going to be put down. She set the leg so thoroughly and nursed the youngster so well that later it won two races at Newmarket.

But with all this absolutely genuine and undeniably skilful doctoring, there is a certain amount of trickery. I have not dealt, and do not intend to deal, with the Gypsy as a "faker" of horseflesh. Suffice it to say that they are quite unsurpassed at the art, and many a broken-down nag has passed for a sprightly stepper or a good sound, strong animal with years of work before it on the day of sale. I have often heard it said that it is most unwise to buy a horse from a Gypsy. If you do not know the Gypsy it probably is. But I also know a farmer who will not buy a horse until it has been examined by a Gypsy friend of his. He has, he says, never been let down.

There is another side to Gypsy medicine. It is obvious that the people who have so great a knowledge of the medicinal properties of the various herbs of the country-

side will not be ignorant of the poisonous plants and their properties. The Gypsy's knowledge of poisons was every whit as profound as his knowledge of simples, and the fact has long been known to gypsiologists and to toxicologists. If you know your Borrow you will remember :

The Rommany chi  
And his Rommany chal,  
Shall jaw Tasaulor  
To drab the bawler  
And dook the gry  
Of the farming rye.

And Borrow had good reason to know something of *drab*, for you may remember he was poisoned and very nearly killed by an old Gypsy woman who, not altogether without reason I fancy, had taken a dislike to him. Yes, the Gypsies did not hesitate to use their knowledge, but poisoning was in the main confined to pigs. They would then beg the body from the farmer and eat the flesh. I think it may truly be said that the practice has long since died out in this country—it is not yet dead on the Continent—but the knowledge has not been entirely forgotten.

The most common poisonous plants of the British countryside are : meadow-saffron, white hellebore, monk's hood (aconite), foxglove, henbane, water hemlock or cowbane, hemlock-water dropwort, five-leaved water hemlock, spotted hemlock, deadly nightshade, black nightshade, woody nightshade or bittersweet, fool's parsley, yew (both leaves and berries), potato tops and seeds, laburnum (both seeds and bark) tobacco, and many species of fungi, especially "warty red caps" (*Agaricus muscarius*) and "brassy caps" (*Agaricus sulphureus*). All these poisons, except possibly "warty red caps" in one form, belong to the class known as "narcotics—irritants," and the first symptom they produce is vomiting with severe internal pains. After that they act as narcotics, causing unconsciousness and, in severe cases, death.

One of the Boswells told Thompson that "warty red

caps"—that, by the way, is surely a Hampshire rather than a Derbyshire name?—was the most powerful *drab* known to Gypsies, and that a few of them used to dry and powder it, though Thompson could not discover for what purpose. The impression given by Thompson is that this was the ancient practice. But I have actually had the stuff shown me by a Gypsy at Devizes Fair. He carried it in an old silver tobacco box and obviously regarded it as a great treasure. He assured me that it would kill anything, but he did not say how long it would take, and he told me that it was made from "warty red caps." He was drunk at the time, or probably I should not have got the information; and, of course, the fact that he was drunk does not make it certain that the information was accurate. However, at St. Giles's Fair at Winchester a year later one of the Barneys told me that this man knew all about *drab*. For what purpose it was used—the sample shown me was obviously old and more of a family heirloom than anything else—and what action it had was not told me. It has been said, however, that the spores of one fungus when given in warm water attach themselves to the mucous membrane of the throat, causing all the symptoms of a phthisis and bringing about death in from two to three weeks. This is referred to at least twice in toxicological literature, and it is definitely stated in one book that the spores are ground down to a fine brown powder. (The powder I was shown was yellowish-brown in colour.) It is further stated that after death the mushrooms soon disappear, leaving no trace whatever: a very useful characteristic.

The favourite *drab* of the New Forest Gypsies used to be foxglove, which was prepared by boiling the leaves in water. But they also used mustard in potatoes for killing pigs (a form of *drab* known to many Gypsies), and they knew all about monk's hood or aconite, one of the deadliest of our native poisons. The method of using mustard was to put it into a potato—new or doughy bread was also used—after the centre had been removed, roll the potato in mud—and then throw it into the sty. The pig having eaten

the potato died pretty quickly. So far as I have been able to gather, aconite was used only for fowls, but I could not be sure about this. I think laburnum seeds were used for a more sinister purpose, since Gerania Lee (she has been dead these ten years so I may give her proper name : she was a Lee who married a gorgio soldier who took to the roads) was at some pains to assure me they looked just like peas. No doubt the south country Gypsies had at one time uses for most of the poisonous plants they came across, since they had not access, as had the Gypsies of the north, to mineral poisons, but I have no further information about the uses to which they put them and I fear that the lore has probably been lost for ever.

Borrow maintained that *drab* was bought by Gypsies in chemists' shops, and Thompson has shown that this was, in fact, the case at least for many East Anglian Gypsies. He obtained a sample—some twenty or so years ago now—and on analysis this proved to be barium carbonate. Now barium carbonate has long been recognised as a very effective rat poison by country people and particularly by professional rat-catchers, but it is not a scheduled poison and it can be bought by anyone and is stocked by most good chemists. Amos Churen knew of its use as *drab* by south country Gypsies, though he denied ever having used it himself, but then he originated in Wales or on the Welsh border and presumably knew about "raw" *drab*. The discovery that this *drab* was barium carbonate, obtained in its natural crystalline form, witherite, was made by Mr. John Myers as recently as 1909. He also discovered one of the sources of supply, a mine near Minsterley in Shropshire, and Thompson has since shown that the Gypsies of the Welsh border, Wales, the midlands and the north knew most of, if not all, the available sources of supply in the country. This was the stuff used by the majority of Gypsies for poisoning pigs and sheep, but mainly pigs, and it may well have been used fairly extensively by south country Gypsies, either bought in chemists' shops or procured from Welsh or midland Gypsies. Thompson even

suggests that one Welsh Gypsy may have acted as a retailer of *drab*, and certainly the name water spar, which is another name for witherite, is not unknown in southern England. Though the stuff killed the pig, the flesh of the pig, though rather pink, was harmless to man. The entrails were thrown away and the head was left untouched, but the rest of the animal could be eaten. I think the practice was followed, probably, only in the hardest times. A Gypsy told Mr. Myers : " Many a poor Romani-chal's family have been brought up by this *bar*." And Borrow in *The Romany Rye* makes a Gypsy say : " Had you tasted that pork, brother, you would have found that it was sweet and tasty, which ballura that is drabbed can hardly be expected to be. We have no reason to drab baulor at present, we have money and credit ; but necessity has no law. Our forefathers occasionally drabbed baulor ; some of our people may still do such a thing, but only from compulsion." That certainly suggests that it was used only as a last resort, but I am not absolutely certain that it was so. At least one family was quite renowned for its fondness for *mulo mas*, and this family was not always in the most straightened circumstances, indeed far from it. Even if the pig had been dead and buried a day or two Gypsies would dig it up and eat it, strange and horrible as it sounds. But that, I fancy, would only be done under the stress of real hunger, though it should be pointed out that certain Hungarian Gypsies have a fondness for carrion and will pass none by that is not too far gone.

Old Mrs. Hearne, an unpleasant lady not troubled with scruples and inspired by a genuine hatred for Borrow, undoubtedly used barium in her attempt to murder that gentleman. 'Borrow's *Lavengro*, and to a much greater extent his *Romany Rye*, are such a mixture of fiction and fact that it is not always possible to say which is which, but he gives a remarkably lucid description of his symptoms after eating Mrs. Hearne's cake, and with the exception of acute diarrhoea, which he does not mention, they are the symptoms of barium poisoning. Moreover, the place

where the poisoning occurred would not have been very far from Minsterley, for we have a pretty accurate record of his movements at the time and even know the date, Saturday, June 11th, 1825, and the time, shortly after midday, when he was poisoned.

The Gypsies had other methods of securing meat when they needed it. One is recorded in *The Times* of November 14th, 1842, and is quoted by Myers. It describes how New Forest Gypsies crammed wool into a sheep's mouth thus causing its death by suffocation. They then begged the dead body, promising to return the skin to the owner. This method of getting meat is remembered by New Forest Gypsies to-day, but is not, of course, practised by them any longer. Another method was to break the neck of a lamb and then place its head through the bars of a gate or in the slats of a fence in such a way as to suggest that death was accidental.

Tinkers also used *drab*. So far as I know, but my information is very scanty and obtained only from one source, they confined their attentions to poultry. The method used was to squash yew berries, extracting the pips, and to give several pips in a small handful of grain. I have been assured, though I cannot vouch for the truth of it, that leghorns, and particularly "they black 'uns," will not take yew pips. I have had some experience as a poultry farmer and have found nothing to suggest that leghorns are any less foolish than other breeds of poultry.

## IX

### GYPSY WAGGONS

THE best known Gypsy possession is the caravan. Even those who know nothing at all about Gypsies know that they have caravans, and, indeed, the words Gypsy and caravan are so closely connected in the mind of the average Englishman as to be almost synonymous. And the caravan is, of course, the most valuable possession of the Gypsy. It is home, and in it he carries his most treasured belongings—clothes, linen, china, a few photographs, perhaps medals won by himself or his family in the last war. But no true Gypsy ever talks of a caravan—unless he means one of those luxurious edifices that in the piping days of peace we used to see trailing along behind fast cars—he talks of a waggon or a van. And the word *vardo* really means living-waggon.

The typical *Romano vardo* is a comparatively recent introduction so far as this country is concerned. Nobody, so far as I know, has written the history of the Gypsy living-waggon, but I have an idea that it was in existence on the Continent, and particularly in Hungary and Bohemia, long before it came here. Dickens, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, was the first person, I think, to describe a waggon in England. He called it a caravan, and his Mrs. Jarley's waggon was obviously very similar in design and interior fittings to the waggons we see on the road to-day. That was in 1840, and there must have been waggons on the roads of Britain long before that, for I think it very unlikely that the living-waggon would have arrived all in one piece as it were. It is much more probable that it was evolved, certainly so far as interior fittings are concerned, bit by bit over a period of years. But a standard in design, and in interior fittings, was reached many years ago, for the modern waggon differs but little—except that it is rarely built of such well-seasoned wood—from those built at the beginning



of the century. The typical living-waggon is a one-roomed house on rather high wheels, with windows at the back and sides and a door and detachable steps at the front. There is a rack (known as the *cratch*) at the back for carrying domestic articles of various kinds, and underneath the waggon at the back there is built a cupboard (known as the pan-box) which serves both as larder and kitchen-cupboard. Inside the waggon, behind the door, are a coal-stove, with a chimney projecting through the roof, a cupboard and a locker-seat. On the other side there is a corner-cupboard for china, a chest of drawers in which is kept the family wardrobe and the family linen, and another locker. The whole of the back part is occupied by a two-berthed sleeping place. Naturally, just as there is some variation from waggon to waggon in external design, so all waggons are not fitted exactly in this way. But the variation inside is so slight that this description may truly serve as a standard.

So far as external design is concerned there are, according to Mr. Ferdinand Gerard Huth, the authority on this branch of Gypsy Lore, broadly speaking, four types of waggon now in use among British Gypsies. I say broadly speaking deliberately, because living-waggons are not mass-produced, and so no two waggons are exactly alike. But there are four easily recognisable types—the Reading waggon, the Leeds waggon, the Ledge waggon and the Burton or Showman's waggon. In addition, there was until fairly recently a fifth type called the Fen or Brush waggon, but I have not seen one for a good many years now.

The Reading waggon, so called because one of the best known builders lived in the Berkshire town, is a straight-sided waggon with the wheels outside the body. Reading was once a great winter resort for Gypsies, but in the hey-day of the great waggon builders, the Dunton family, Romanichals came from all over Britain to have waggons made for them. Reading waggons are usually about 10 feet 6 inches in length, but I have heard of one in Sussex

that was 14 feet long. In width they are usually 6 feet at the bottom and 6 feet 6 inches at the eaves. There are a number of different types of Reading waggon—the variations on the basic design being related solely to the depth or otherwise of the purchaser's pockets. The better and more expensive ones are fitted with a skylight. Some are very ornate and some are very simple, but all are the same in having straight sides and outside wheels. Reading waggons were not, of course, built only by the Dunton family or only at Reading. Plenty of other makers also built this type of waggon and, in particular, excellent ones were made by a firm in Derbyshire.

The Leeds waggon is so called because the most famous builder of this type, one Bill Wright, lived near Leeds. It is also known as the bow or barrel-topped waggon because of its shape. The usual length is about 9 feet 6 inches and the usual width at the widest part of the barrel is 6 feet to 6 feet 2 inches. These waggons are very popular among north country Gypsies, but are not very often seen in the south country. I have heard an old Gypsy declare that a good Leeds waggon would outlive any other sort of waggon under any conditions. Leeds waggons are made in many other parts of the country, but the best builders still seem to be in Yorkshire, for I have heard a young west country Gypsy speak of them as "Yorkshire" waggons instead of Leeds waggons.

The Ledge waggon (some people call them Cottage waggons) is the type most commonly seen on the roads, for these waggons are made by all the recognised builders, and are not connected even by Gypsies with any particular place or any particular builder. In construction they come midway, as it were, between the Reading and the Leeds waggon. That is to say, they are not straight-sided and do not have outside wheels, they are not barrel-topped but have roofs very similar to those of the Reading waggon. The usual length is from 9 feet 6 inches to 10 feet, and the usual width 6 feet to 6 feet 2 inches at the widest part.

The Burton—presumably from Burton-on-Trent, but I have found nothing to suggest that better waggons were made there than anywhere else—or Showman's waggon is a straight-sided waggon like the Reading, but the wheels are placed underneath the body instead of outside it. There are a good many other differences too, so that no one could possibly mistake the one for the other. For one thing all Burton waggons are made with a panelled or, less frequently, a rib and matchboard body, these latter sometimes with a panel about 4 inches wide running right round the centre of the body. For another the roof is much flatter than in the Reading waggon. Again, all Burton waggons have pieces of carved wood attached to them somewhere or other. In the panelled type these pieces of ornate carving (which vary, of course, with the whim of the individual builder) are screwed on to the panels, but with the rib and matchboard type they are usually attached only at the corners. The usual length is 10 feet 6 inches and the usual width 6 feet.

The last horse-drawn Fen or Brush waggon that I saw was in Wiltshire and a good many years ago now. It was, I imagine, the last of its kind, for I have not heard of one since, and horse-drawn at least they may now be considered extinct. That is a pity, for there can be no doubt at all that they were by far the most picturesque of all waggons, but they were never popular with true Gypsies, and were used, as a rule, by *poshtrais* or by people of dubious character who had taken to the roads to earn a yet more dubious living. The owner of the waggon I saw was not a Gypsy and could lay claim to very little Gypsy blood. He earned a living hawking brushes, baskets, pots and pans, and anything he picked up on his travels, and for this sort of living, which is not the true Gypsy way of doing things, the Fen or Brush waggon was excellently adapted, for it had external racks and cases for displaying wares for sale, and goods could be carried on the roof, for a rail ran all round to protect them. Motorised Brush waggons are still to be seen in some remote country districts, but I think it may

safely be said that they are never owned by Gypsies, but usually by a shop in some country town. The name "Brush" is obviously derived from the type of goods most usually carried and displayed for sale. The name "Fen" seems to indicate an East Anglian origin for these waggons, but as far as I know there is no evidence to suggest that the original builder lived in the Fen country. The owner of the waggon I saw in Wiltshire, however, called it a Fen waggon.

In addition to the waggons there are two types of cart in use among British Gypsies. One, which may be built with two wheels or four wheels, is called the Pot cart : the other, which is two-wheeled, has not got, so far as I know, any particular name. These carts are used especially by travellers who live on the roads only during the spring, summer and autumn, and move into small houses for the winter. But they are also used in conjunction with the living-waggons in a variety of ways—for the children to sleep in, for example, or for goods to be carried in, or for short journeys when goods are taken for hawking or firewood is sold, and so on. In fact they are useful in many ways. The word cart, at least so far as the four-wheeled Pot cart is concerned, is rather misleading. "Cart" indicates a simple structure, and the four-wheeled Pot cart is anything but simple. Generally they are about 9 feet long and 4 feet wide across the floor. Some are made with open-work frame inside, but I have never seen one of this type. Those I have seen have had sides as solid as any farm cart, and I should imagine that those built with frame sides must be very draughty when the tilt is on. There is a projecting frame at the front of the cart under which is a shallow locker, the whole forming a seat, and slung at the back, and below the back rack, is the pan-box exactly as in a living-waggon. I believe that some of the two-wheeled Pot carts have also a pan-box, but I have not seen one so fitted. Both four- and two-wheeled Pot carts are fitted with a detachable frame, barrel-shaped as in the Leeds waggon. This frame is hooped and over these hoops a green proofed sheet is spread. The back is match-

board with, in the centre, a window that is hinged at the top and opens outward at the bottom. To the front of the green proofed sheet are attached curtains of the same material. I have never seen any interior fittings to these carts, but I believe some have such fittings and that one or two even go in for stoves. These carts are not wide enough for an adult to sleep in in any position but lengthways. There is, therefore, no fixed bed. The bedding is just laid down on the floor at night and rolled up and stowed away at the back during the day.

The other type of cart has a back rack, but no locker in the front and no pan-box at the rear. They are fitted with a detachable hoop frame over which is stretched a green or black tarpaulin sheet with curtain both at the back and the front. I have never seen any interior fittings, but I believe that some carts are fitted. Of this type of cart there are two sub-types, one a good deal narrower and shorter than the other. In these, which are definitely a poorer type, a few boards are laid across the back from one side to the other and on these boards the children sleep, while their parents sleep on the floor with their heads at the front of the cart and their feet underneath the boards which form their children's bed. The wider and longer cart, which is altogether superior (some of them have a matchboard back with a window) are wide enough for an adult to sleep across. In these carts the width is generally 6 feet and the height from the floor to the top of the tilt is usually about 5 feet 6 inches. These carts, moreover, have struts for their shafts, and there are also two struts at the back, so that at night the cart can be made absolutely level. I have never seen struts on the poorer type of cart and all sorts of ingenious methods are used for keeping them level, though the most usual seems to be to run the shafts into a thick hedge. I have seen the frames removed from the carts and used on the ground as tents (when they look not unlike igloos), for the ground makes a softer bed than the boards and, if the weather be dry, a sweeter bed, too, I have no doubt.

Sleeping arrangements in a living-waggon are naturally infinitely superior to those in a cart, and for comfort many of them could not be beaten by the best hotel in the world. The bed-place varies slightly with the type of waggon, but the principle is the same in all waggons. The bed-place, which occupies the whole of the rear of the waggon, consists of two berths, one above the other, and in a straight-sided waggon these are 6 feet long by 3 feet 10 inches to 4 feet wide. Naturally they are not so long, or at least the lower berth is not so long, in waggons that are not straight-sided. Across the front of the bed-place, that is across the front of the top berth, is a turned spindle rail about 6 inches wide. There is also a spindle rail enclosing a narrow shelf above the back window. Some bed-places, generally in the older waggons, have fixed bed-posts standing out about a foot from the side of the waggon and stretching from floor to ceiling, where they meet the arched roof-board. These posts are turned, and sometimes beautifully carved, from the top of the upper berth to the roof, but below they are square—and serve as the door-posts for the doors of the lower bed. If there are bed-posts there are almost always brightly coloured curtains tied back to them. The doors of the bottom berth are panelled and open outwards in this type of bed-place, but in some waggons the doors slide back behind a fixed panel. In this type there are, of course, no posts. Nowadays, for the young Gypsy woman is every whit as interested in her appearance as her more sophisticated sister of the town, mirror shutters are generally found as one of the fitments of the bed-place. In any van that is not straight-sided the length of the bottom bed is not sufficient for an adult—in many it does not exceed  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet, and so is really suitable only for small children. If adults have to use the bottom beds of this sort they lie parallel to the sides of the van with their feet stretching out towards the waggon door. The beds in these living-waggons are invariably comfortable. Only really good feather-beds are used as a rule and they are treated with the greatest care. Furthermore, the wealthier Gypsy

women use the finest linen sheets (they are treasured family possessions which are not parted with under any circumstances to a gorgio, and only as a last resort to any other Gypsy, though sometimes they are destroyed in funeral pyres), and these sheets are as often as not bordered with wonderful crochet-work or the finest hand-made lace. Nowadays, of course, excellent quality eiderdowns are to be found in the living-waggons and wonderful bedspreads and quilts. Quite the finest patchwork quilt I have ever seen was in a living-waggon, and the owner's wife was engaged upon another which bid fair to rival it in every way. More than one Gypsy woman of my acquaintance has remarkable skill with the needle (it is a quality with which they are not generally credited) and does first-class work, but I do not know of any Gypsy woman who does such work for sale. Most Gypsy women take an infinite pride in their vans and go to infinite pains to keep their interiors as perfect as possible. Indeed I have seen very few slovenly waggons, no matter how slovenly their owners might appear. "House-proud" is not a characteristic of the gorgio alone. And yet no matter how fine the living-waggon or how comfortable the bed, in hot weather at least many Romani men and women prefer to sleep in the open underneath their vans. And I know one or two who though they own excellent waggons always sleep in a tent, or, if the weather is really fine, in the open.

Next to the bed in importance is the stove. I put the stove second in importance because most of the cooking is done in the open over a wood fire anyhow. In the older vans the type of stove is that known as the "Colchester" open grate. In this type of stove the case of the grate is made of sheet-iron with a brass front and blower to draw up the fire which slides down on brass side rods. The top of the case is conical, tapering up to the roof, where it joins the chimney pipe. In some of these stoves (the more recent ones) there is a small side oven and a trivet for the kettle. Above them is a curved mantelpiece with three brass rails to prevent things falling off. I have met old

Gypsies who swear by these stoves, but I have never met a Gypsy woman who prefers them to the "Hostess," which is the type found in all the more modern waggons. The "Colchester" on a windy day is not the cleanest of companions in the confined space of a living-waggon. In the modern waggons the boxed-in panelled fireplace, with tile-pattern enamelled iron plates surrounding it, and the "Hostess" range with its brass rail round the top and brass-fronted coal-box sliding underneath, is as clean as anyone could wish. These fireplaces are built in as fixtures. They have a brass-railed mantelpiece in the same way as the "Colchester," but behind the mantelpiece is an airing-cupboard with a door in the side of the fireplace. The chimney pipe passes through this cupboard—there is no fear of scorching clothes because it is enclosed in another pipe for the length of its passage through the cupboard—and so through the roof. The "Hostess" has indeed a number of advantages over the "Colchester," but the latter, despite its tendency to spread ash over everything, is undoubtedly more cheerful and more spiritually, if not physically, warming.

The rest of the furniture is composed of locker-seats, cupboards and a chest of drawers. The arrangement varies slightly with the type of van and even from van to van, but there are usually two lockers with comfortable upholstered seats, a square cupboard, a corner cupboard and a chest-of-drawers. Both the cupboards have two compartments, the top having glass doors and the bottom wooden panelled doors. In the square cupboard the two compartments are separated by a narrow drawer which is used for keeping knives, spoons, forks and so on. There is no drawer in the corner cupboard. The chests-of-drawers are usually level-fronted and have a polished table-top and sometimes an extra folding-leaf. Otherwise they are just like chests-of-drawers anywhere else—two small drawers at the top and three long ones underneath them—though in some of the waggons with narrower floor space (Ledge waggons for example) the bottom drawer is replaced by a



narrow cupboard with a front that lets down on hinges, but is made to look like a drawer.

In the corner cupboard the Romani wife keeps her china—her plates and cups and so forth. These are always of very good china, much better than is to be found in the average English middle-class home. Some of this china is old, but the modern is usually of the best quality, and replacements are usually made from the best quality obtainable. Poor china is not a feature of the *Romano vardo*. So, too, with the china figures and brass candlesticks that adorn the mantelpiece. They are good. Often they are rare pieces of Staffordshire or Chelsea, but sometimes they are modern: if they are, the taste is impeccable and the china excellent. The same is true of the brass candlesticks. They are good, old and heavy. The brass production of Birmingham does not impress the Romani. Indeed the only furnishings in these living-waggon that I have seen that has not been of first-rate quality has been the linoleum on the floor. Usually that is good, too, and the rug or strip of carpet is always as good as the owner can afford, and some of the rugs are old and valuable, but in some waggons I have found linoleum that has obviously been bought on the principle that anything is good enough for the floor. Check linoleum is not popular, but I have recently seen a waggon, the property of a young couple just setting out on the hard road of the traveller, which was fitted up with cheerful check curtains and a strip of excellent check linoleum. The effect was most pleasing.

When new, the waggons are, of course, painted by the builders. As with farm carts and waggons, there are, or seem to be, certain stereotyped colours. But these wear off in time, and then the Gypsy artist comes into his own. True, many more vans than not remain unpainted and gradually increase in shabbiness until some excite wonder, wonder that they are still able to move over the roads and hold together. But some have owners with an artistic urge, and plenty of leisure in which to satisfy it, and the results are wonderful. I have seen a black van tastefully picked

out in red, a red van picked out in green with bright yellow wheels, a red van picked out in black with yellow and black wheels (red, yellow and black are just as truly the Gypsy colours to-day as they were in Lord Lilford's day), but sometimes the effect is bizarre in the extreme. One traveller of my acquaintance just dabbed a spot of paint on whenever he felt like it and had any paint. As he also mended his van by nailing any odd bit of wood over the affected part the result was interesting, if somewhat unusual.

I have known one Gypsy artist who painted dragons on the outside of his van. He had snakes wandering along the shafts and lions and elephants on the half-door. This sort of external decoration is most unusual, but there is a great deal of outside decoration to the vans by means of carving. This is really a study in itself and is a subject about which, I fear, I know very little. Much of the decorative work on the waggons is copied, of course, from works of gorgio origin. But there is still much work about which is of true Romani origin, and sometimes you will still come across a Gypsy craftsman who has no need of models. Then you may be sure that you are watching real folk craft, that something, perhaps centuries old, is being recreated before your eyes.

A special study could also be made of Gypsy harness, on which subject I am again much indebted to Mr. Huth. The type generally used by Gypsies is a van harness made with plated or brass fittings. Plated fittings are more common among Gypsies, but I think that brass induces a greater pride in the owner. The bridle of a good set of harness has a red patent-leather forehead-band with a chain front. The ornaments on the blinkers (invariably shield-shaped) and on other parts of the harness are usually engraved with the owner's initials mounted on a piece of red patent-leather, and another piece of red patent-leather, usually scalloped, sticks out from the back of the blinkers. The bridle is usually fitted with a stainless double-ring snaffle-bit and bridoon chains. There is a throat strap that

unbuckles at both sides, and a bearing rein as well as driving reins. The ends of the straps thread into plated metal instead of leather runners. Generally the horse's collar is of the piped type and has a serge lining, and is topped with ornamental housing. The hames are fitted with short chain-tugs and have curled tops, and above the hame strap is another strap bearing a name plate. Most of these name plates are decorated with three galloping horses. The pad is the usual waggon type ornamented with shield-shaped bosses and half-round beading, both plated. The back-strap is fitted with very large leather tug-loops because the shafts of a *vardo* are usually pretty thick. The crupper often has two or three loin-straps faced with red patent-leather and ornamented with plated shields. The breeching is fitted with short chain tugs. All the strappings are stitched on the two edges. All the straps—back-strap, belly-band, etc.—unbuckle on both sides. The reason for this is that it is much more adjustable and so is more easily fitted to horses of any size, a very sensible provision where Gypsies are concerned. This sort of harness is made only by certain saddlers. There is a very good one, for example, at Thame in Oxfordshire.

Sometimes, however, one comes across remarkable brass fittings to Gypsy harness sets. Horse brasses are a subject of perennial interest, and every carter worth the name takes the greatest pride in his brasses if he has a good set. In these days of mechanisation they are not seen as often as they might be, but they are still remarkably hard to pick up from the collecting point of view. Some find their way to Gypsy sets and I have seen some very good ones on the road. Years ago it was the fashion for the nobility or great landed gentry to have their crest or monogram on their horse brasses. On the harness of a traveller in Dorset not long ago I saw the crest of one of our great ducal houses—on just a single piece. But my most astonishing find in this way was in Surrey, where on a very ordinary turn-out I found three brasses bearing the arms of some Indian Rajah. They were genuine, not Birmingham imitations, and they

were old and worn. At some time they had adorned, I fancy, the royal elephants. When I asked the owner where he had got them he replied that when he knew what business it was of mine he would be "wery pleased to tell me," but as it was no business of mine he would be "wery pleased not to."

One horse is sufficient to draw a light waggon. When the van is heavy a pony is put on the off-side to help the horse. This pony is known as a "sider," and sometimes you will see a "sider" to an obviously light van when the horse is not as good as it might be. To keep the "sider" in position a short rope is run from its bridle to the tug ring on the hame of the horse. When two or more waggons are travelling in company they help one another up very steep hills by doubling, which is by taking the horse from one waggon and putting him in traces in front of the horse in the other. When the first waggon reaches the top of the hill both horses are taken out and walked back to fetch the second waggon. When climbing steep hills one of the boys, or if there is not a boy one of the women, walks behind the waggon carrying a block of wood fixed on to the end of a stick. When the horses stop to regain their wind the wheels are blocked up.

I have devoted a good deal of space to the Gypsy horse-drawn living-waggon because I have an idea that in the not-distant future it will have disappeared from the roads and lanes of Britain. Already, in too many places, they have become immobilised, the shafts are down, they are no more than shacks on wheels occupying year in and year out the same position on some patch of derelict ground. And somehow once the waggon becomes a fixture it loses all personality. It becomes a hovel, the field almost a rural slum. The Gypsy was never intended for a sedentary life, even a sedentary life in the open. An excellent example of this is to be seen—and it may be seen from the railway without any inconvenience—on the outskirts of Ash Vale in Surrey.

I shall regret the passing of the horse-drawn waggon. I

like its picturesqueness. But it would be idle to pretend that it is an essential part of the true Gypsy way of life. It is a comparatively recent introduction. It is now no more than a symbol of the brief prosperity that came to the British Romanies in the last century.

## X

### GYPSIES TO-DAY

GEORGE BORROW was of the opinion that he was studying a race that would soon die out. Leland, who followed after Borrow, was of the same opinion. When Borrow travelled the roads of Britain in the early years of the last century the Romani language was spoken grammatically by many, perhaps the majority of Gypsies. When Leland travelled the same roads in the latter half of the century the language was already becoming a jargon, and many of the customs and taboos were already falling into disuse or had already become so greatly modified as to be scarcely recognisable. The process has continued. Even in Wales, where Sampson a mere fifty years ago rediscovered the language spoken in all its perfection of vocabulary, construction and inflexion, speakers of pure Romani are to-day very few and far between. In England it has become altogether corrupted. Anglo-Romani is now no more than a jargon. Judging by the language alone it would seem that Borrow and Leland were right. They were, I think, utterly wrong.

Romani is the language of the Gypsies. It is the same language all over the world wherever Gypsies are to be found, and naturally it varies enormously from country to country. Some words are the same and have the same meaning everywhere (though the pronunciation may vary slightly) and in some countries the language is much more complete than in others, in some many more words of the native language have been incorporated than in others, in some the native language has almost replaced the mother tongue. This is what has happened in Britain. The inflexions have been lost, there is no longer any attempt at grammar or construction, a very large part of the vocabulary has been forgotten. I do not suppose that there is a single English Gypsy living who can speak pure

Romani and there are very, very few Welsh Gypsies left who can do so. There are, indeed, very, very few to-day who possesses any extensive vocabulary (I lay no claim to being a Romani scholar, but I am too "deep" for many of the English Gypsies I have met), but they cling passionately to those words they do know and they take care that their children shall know them also. So you will find that most English Gypsies talk a queer mixture of English and Romani with the English predominating. If you are a *mush* what *jins* the *chib* it is all right, but if you are not it must be very confusing indeed. But, despite all this, it would be a very great mistake to regard (as many do) Romani in England as a dead language. It is not dead, and, I am sure, it will never die. It is, on the other hand, very much alive. It is in the blood of Gypsies, part of their being, and it is never entirely forgotten. Sometimes a word never commonly used, a word that might truly be said to be forgotten, will come to the surface in some sudden burst of excited speech or in the telling of a story. Sometimes the word is not an English Romani word at all. Thus, once in the New Forest I listened to a Lee recounting the tale of a poaching expedition, a famous adventure that had had more than its share of excitement. He took his listeners step by step through the night and then as he approached the climax he suddenly said "*Disilo*." I asked him what it meant. "Day comes," he said impatiently, and went on with the tale. I had never heard that word from any English Gypsy. But it is used sometimes among Balkan Gypsies and means just what it meant to this Hampshire Lee. The excitement of the story had acted like some great volcanic disturbance in his mind and thrown up to the surface a word long since forgotten, one which maybe he had heard in childhood from his grandfather or perhaps from some wandering stranger, but a word not forgotten absolutely. Yet when I asked him a week or two later did he know the word, *Disilo*, he said no, and was obviously astounded to hear that he had ever used it. So, too, I have heard the word *shil* used for

“ a whistle ” (it comes from the same part of the world), *mindtsi* used for “ a virgin ” (I do not know where this comes from) and *gabor* used for “ how much. ” These are certainly not Anglo-Romani words, but I do not think that their occurrence among New Forest Gypsies need occasion much surprise. Foreign Gypsies are by no means as uncommon as all that in England—I have myself come across “ Greek,” “ Roumanian ” and “ Russian ” Gypsies in southern England (a band of “ Roumanian ” Gypsies spent some time in the New Forest in 1923)—and some of their words would stick if there was any intercourse with their English cousins. In the same way, words that are not Romani at all (*mindtsi* may be one for all I know) sometimes come bubbling to the surface. I have heard *balow* used for a “ broken nose ” by a Stanley. And twice I have heard Moroccan or Arabic words (I do not know which), used by English Gypsies. Once in a quarrel between two of the Barneys, husband and wife, the woman in a furious rage hurled a plate at her husband shouting “ *Balec*, you bloody toad.” It was obvious enough what she meant. Afterwards I asked her what it meant, but she had already forgotten or would not remember. But anyone who has been in Morocco will know what *Balec* means : it means “ Make way.” This Gypsy woman meant “ get out of my sight.” The other word was also used by the same woman. It was near Winchester, and she was referring to a churchyard in the neighbourhood that has a slightly unsavoury reputation with the country folk as a haunt of ghosts. “ It’s *horm*,” she said, “ it’s *horm*.” I understand that the word cannot be translated exactly into English, but it means roughly something that is holy in a supernatural way and must only be visited or touched by the initiated. Now this woman, to my knowledge, has never been out of England, never even as far as Chichester on the one side or Weymouth on the other, so how she got hold of these two words is beyond guessing. But she spent a good deal of time in Southampton as a girl and perhaps picked them up from some visiting Arab sailor. Anyway, there they were, deep



down in her subconscious mind, and I should not be at all surprised to find her children using them one day. In the same way I have heard Romani children using soldier's Hindustani quite naturally, picked up no doubt from parents or other Gypsies who served in the British forces abroad in the last war. So, too, you will find queer forms of Romani used sometimes by English Gypsies. Again in the New Forest I have heard, frequently too, *prala* for brother, though I have never heard it anywhere else. Amos Churen always used *kongry* for a match, and *kari* for a hat—words I have never heard used by anyone else—and David Burton always talked of a policeman as a *yokmush*, which is sensible enough since it means “eye-man,” but a word I have never heard used in that connection by any other Gypsy. I have, however, heard it used by a small boy to describe a night-watchman for the Hampshire County Council Highways Department. This lad used to make use of the watchman's brazier and was very friendly with him, always calling him *yokmush*. Children, I have found, are often “deeper” than their parents and will use words quite naturally that their parents do not know or have forgotten, or at any rate appear to have forgotten, for you can never be certain. You can never be certain just how much Romani an English Gypsy does know. The poorest speaker may remember some word or words long since forgotten, or never known, by those who speak the language comparatively well, and I always have the idea that the modern English Gypsy can speak his language a good deal better than he is going to let the mere gorgio know. I cannot, therefore, agree with those who maintain that Romani in England is a dead language. It may for everyday use become even more of a jargon than it is at present, but it will, I am sure, always remain very much alive in the minds of the Romani folk. And certainly I cannot agree with those who see in the growth of jargon signs of the passing of the Gypsy race in England. If it is a sign of anything it is a sign of adaptability, and that is surely a sign of strength. For in the same period as the Gypsies

have been in England the English language has altered almost beyond recognition. The spoken language of to-day is as far from Tudor English as Tudor English was from Chaucerian English. Language undergoes evolution just as everything else does.

Nor can the passing of the old Gypsy customs, the old Gypsy dress, the old Gypsy occupations be regarded as proof of the passing of the Gypsy. Our own dress, our own customs, or own occupations have changed no less drastically in the last 400 years. It would be foolish to pretend that the Englishman of to-day is the same as the Englishman of Henry VII's day: but he is still an Englishman. It would be idle to pretend that the Gypsy of to-day is the same as the Gypsy of 400 years ago, but he is still a Gypsy. And taking it all in all, his way of life has altered less than that of any other people in Europe. Shiftless and happy-go-lucky as he is, inveterate wanderer as he is, he is yet the most conservative being on earth. And this applies with equal force to his methods of earning a living.

The ways in which Gypsies earn a living are legion. No less than 135 are listed in the Index to the Old Series of the *Journal* of the Gypsy Lore Society, and this number could probably be doubled or trebled without undue difficulty. It is true that that list covers Gypsy occupations all over the world, and that quite a lot of them have never been followed by British Gypsies, while some of them, snake-charming for example, have probably never been followed by more than a few individuals. But it does indicate a certain versatility. And the Gypsy is a most versatile person. Horse-dealing between the two great wars was not always as paying a business as it used to be, but there was a very good trade to be done in second-hand motor-cars. I knew one Gypsy who traded in cars of uncertain age and unwilling performance. He was quite as successful a car-doctor as his father had been a horse-doctor, and was as successful in buying and selling old cars as his father had been in buying and selling

horses. A true Gypsy can make a living out of anything—or nothing. It is not, therefore, surprising to find so extensive a list of occupations. But it would be a mistake—certainly so far as British, and probably so far as any Gypsies are concerned—to regard many of these occupations as typical of Gypsies. Most of those mentioned in literature as being followed by Gypsies are no more than temporary aids to a living. The normal occupations of the Gypsies, whether British or not, are very few.

Naturally, these normal occupations vary according to the country in which the people concerned have made a home. Music, for example, is part of the Gypsy's life. Most English Gypsies are passionately fond of music, and not a few of them are excellent performers. But music among British Gypsies has never become a full-time occupation. There have been a few whole-time Welsh Gypsy musicians, both harpers and fiddlers (John Roberts was Telynor Cymru, Harper of Wales, the highest honour), and the fiddle has often been used by English and Scots Gypsies and by Irish tinkers to earn a few shillings, but for the British Gypsy in general music has remained a relaxation. In Hungary a large proportion of the orchestras are composed of Gypsies, and many are entirely Gypsy in personnel. Similarly, there are not, so far as I know, any British families of coppersmiths or silversmiths or blacksmiths, although I know of more than one man who could turn his hands to such trades and make a decent showing provided no complicated work was required. Nor do I know of a British Gypsy bear-leader, though bear-leading certainly deserves to rank as a regular Gypsy occupation. No longer do we see the dancing bear on the English roads. There were still some when I was a child, and I can remember two well, one because I touched the bear and the other because the man had a long feather in his black hat. Neither, I feel pretty certain, was English. I can also remember a man who had two trained monkeys that wore little red coats and collected the money earned by the man's fiddling, and a woman who danced with a tam-

bourine. I do not think these could have been English Gypsies either, but the occupations are normal enough for Balkan Gypsies.

Some occupations are, however, common to Gypsies all over the world, and of these fortune-telling and horse-dealing are the most popular, the various forms of the smith's art and music coming next. And to these should be added, though I do not know that they are ever whole-time occupations, begging and poaching. All Gypsies do not beg, by no means all, but all Gypsies are really accomplished beggars ; all Gypsies do not poach, by no means all, but all Gypsies know more than a little about poaching. These are the staple Gypsy occupations (perhaps I should not include poaching as a staple occupation, it being largely a matter of opportunity and being common to more countrymen than the average landowner realises). The others—acrobats and jugglers, knife-grinders and cobblers, flower-sellers and street musicians, and dancers and griddlers (a "griddler" is a man or woman who sings in the street), and so on through all the manifold ways of turning an honest penny—are temporary occupations for the majority of Gypsies, though there are one or two families of Gypsy acrobats and jugglers and knife-grinders. Even these, however, are not at a loss when it comes to dealing with a horse, nor are their women nonplussed when it comes to a bit of *dukkeriben*. There was a Scamp who travelled a restricted area of Kent with a knife-grinding machine and had a very good side-line in horses, while one of his daughters made the most of Canterbury Cricket Week in the fortune-telling line. And then most Gypsies are hawkers. Some hawk what they make, but most hawk stuff they have bought on the cheap.

The actual occupations that I have personally come across among British Gypsies in the past twenty years or so (I have come across many others among Gypsies abroad) make a varied enough list. These are some of them : Punch and Judy showman, skittle-alley proprietor, dancing marionette man, chimney sweep, basket maker, beehive

maker, clothes-peg maker, china mender, knife and scissors grinder, umbrella mender, wild birds' egg collector (he sold his finds to a wealthy man in London), kettle and general pots and pans mender, acrobat, jockey, bare-back rider in a circus (it is a mistake to suppose that many Gypsies join the circus : the circus is an entirely separate world, alike only in that it is also nomadic), blacksmith, rat-catcher, mole-catcher, horse-dealer, cattle-dealer, farmer, horse-doctor, herb-gatherer, mason, chairmaker, singer, fiddler, house-painter, palmist, phrenologist, café proprietor, chucker-out at cinema, herbalist (quite different from herb-gatherer), fortune-telling (using a crystal only), rabbit-catcher, fisherman, professional wrestler, pawnbroker, and professional boxer. In every case these men were full-blooded or nearly full-blooded Gypsies, with the exception of the pawnbroker, who lived in Portsmouth and from whom I bought some very good carpets. I was never sure about the pawnbroker. He had very fair hair and very blue eyes—but so have lots of Gypsies : the Grays, for instance, are a very fair family—and he dressed like a business man, but he spoke a good deal of Romani rather well, and his wife and his children looked very Gypsy. Also he shook hands like a Gypsy. The house-painter was quite definitely a full-blooded Gypsy—a Loveridge from Dorset—who had married a gorgie from Glasgow who was maid-servant at a big house near Ferndown. He returned with her to Glasgow, for she would not take to the roads and he was very much in love with her. He hated towns and loathed house-painting, but he stuck Glasgow till a bomb in the blitz killed him.

Gypsies are naturally handy with their fists, and there have been many famous Gypsy boxers. In the old bare-knuckle days the Gypsy was a power in the British professional ring. The following Champions of England under Prize Ring Rules were Gypsies : Tom Smith (the feather-weight champion of 1844), Hooper the Tinman (who was middle-weight champion in 1790 and whose real name was William Cooper), Posh Price (a middle-weight champion of

the early nineteenth century, whose real name was Amos Price), Tom Sayers (who was heavy-weight champion of England in 1857 and who fought the famous battle with Heenan)—Joe Goss is also supposed to have been a Gypsy, but the name is not a Romani name. Goss, however, went the round of the fairs with a booth and undoubtedly had a Romani wife name Helen Gray—and, of course, Jem Mace, the most famous of them all and a true champion of the world. With the coming of the gloves there have been fewer Gypsies in the British ring, but some of them have done remarkably well. Digger Stanley won a world's championship and Gypsy Daniels an English championship. There was more than a little Gypsy blood in Joe Bowker, Pedlar Palmer (whose mother was a London-side Lee) and Joe Beckett. Peerless Jem Driscoll is commonly regarded as a Welshman as he came from South Wales. He had not got, so far as I know, a single drop of Welsh blood in him. He came of a travelling Irish tinker family and a Romani mother named Taylor or Jones. He learned his boxing in travelling booths run by a Gypsy named Boswell who travelled South Wales, the west country and the midlands. Jem could *rakker Romanes* with the best of them, and I remember well the pleased smile on his face when I wished him *Kushto Bok* the night he fought his last fight, a grand but tragic effort, against Charles Ledoux. Quite recently one Charlie Hickman showed for a few fights promise of bringing the Gypsy to the fore in the heavy-weight ring again, but he soon faded away after a few good fights, and the last I heard of him he was touring the fair grounds of the midlands. The normal Gypsy method of fighting—head on chest and elbows held well into the ribs—was no doubt excellent for the old bare-knuckle prize ring, but it has considerable drawbacks for the ring of to-day, which may be one of the reasons for the lack of Gypsy champions of recent years.

The Gypsy is by no means averse to a fight, is indeed inclined to be quarrelsome when *motto*, and is certainly not a physical coward. But no one could rightfully call the

average Gypsy a tough. His appearance is deceptive. The Irish tinker is a tough, though his appearance is also, as often as not, deceptive. He is by nature a fighter, and he fights with a cold fury and a fixed desire to maim that is rather frightening. When the travelling Irish first invaded Wales and the Welsh border counties they came into rough contact with the Gypsies, and the Gypsies very definitely had the worst of it. So much so, in fact, that they would move camp rather than risk a fight, unless they were in greatly superior numbers. All that was long ago, and the Irish tinker, with the passage of time, and influenced, perhaps, by the English climate and certainly by marriage with Welsh and English (and Romani), has softened, if he has not entirely disappeared. But the memory lingers in the Gypsy mind. In the same way the Irishmen of Liverpool have softened considerably since the days of Dr. Sampson's Shelta explorations, but their reputation is not altogether dead.

To-day an Irish tinker, as opposed to an Irish tramp, is a rarity on the roads of England, and almost a rarity in Wales. I have known only one, and he only in his old age, a mellowed, humorous, generous man. I am, therefore, not at all qualified to write about Irish tinkers and, maybe, James was a different fellow when the blood was hot in his veins. I can write of him only as I have found him, kindly and courteous. Mind you, I am not saying he has not his faults. It depends how you look on these things. His language is not always fit for a drawing-room ; indeed it has shocked more than one English tramp into silence. He has, in fact, the largest store of round, mighty and extraordinary oaths that I have ever heard, a command of the picturesque in swearing that must, I am sure, be unrivalled in the British Isles. Yes, but he has, too, a magnificent command of the traditional tales of Irish folklore, a great love of poetry, and the soul of a poet. He plays the fiddle divinely. He has never, I am sure, stolen money or clothes or personal property. But he is an inveterate and highly skilled poacher. He does not, how-

ever, poach to sell. He regards that as a low form of crime. He poaches to eat : not for James the paying of butchers' or fishmongers' bills. And he poaches only when he must eat (which is, of course, regularly !) and then only sufficient for his needs. He does this—not from any altruistic reason—but solely because it takes less time and is therefore less risky. He does not poach for sport.

His equipment is simple : a catapult, a very long whip with a very short handle, a net or two, a pair of highly trained dogs and his hands. He hardly ever sets a snare, though he knows how to as well as any man : snares take time to fill, and James likes to be quick. The reason for his success, of course, is his uncanny knowledge of the ways of birds and animals. He knows more about the ways of the wild creatures of the countryside than any other man I have known, and far, far more than any gamekeeper I have met. But then he has lived all his life in the open, cheek by jowl, day and night, with the wild creatures of the countryside, and he is a naturally observant man with a great love for birds and animals.

I have described in an earlier book how I have seen him bring down a roosting pheasant with his long whip, and so silently that he has a moment later got the next on the roost by the same method. That is a feat requiring great knowledge not only of how to use a whip but of woodcraft. It is no easy job to approach roosting pheasants without disturbing them, or disturbing something that will disturb them. And I have seen him take a hare in its form with his bare hands, just walk up to it in broad daylight. It may sound easy or incredible : it depends upon how much you know of the way of hares. I should have said it was impossible had I not seen it done. James assures me that it is easy, and I now know how to do it (more or less !), but I am not going to put temptation in your way. I have also seen him take rabbits with his catapult—by no means an easy feat for a crack shot—but his catapult is reserved as a rule for birds, and his method for rabbits and hares is the net and his dogs.



His dogs are trained to a pitch I have not yet encountered in any other dogs anywhere, though I have heard rumours of a Dorset farm labourer who, if the jade does not lie, has a better pair. The dogs are a pure-bred greyhound and a greyhound x collie. They seem to know exactly what their master means by every word and every gesture, and they know exactly what to do when the night's work is over. They never accompany him home, and they always return home separately and by devious routes. I understand that the Dorset man can get his dogs to meet him at a given spot, and though this may sound incredible I do not believe that it is beyond the ability of a good trainer with intelligent dogs. James's dogs are not up to that standard, but they are not fools. They know better than to follow at master's heels. They know exactly what to do should a policeman or a gamekeeper appear: they vanish—but they will be waiting in hedge or ditch further along the road. Nor does James ever talk to them. His orders are given by signs and occasionally by whistle, but as often as not the dogs know what is required of them and have no need of orders. And they know better than to follow master home: the night's work finished the three separate, each finding its own way home. These dogs are much, much more intelligent and much better and steadier than the best of Field Trial Champions, and I have watched most of the Field Trial Champions of the last ten years or so.

Taking rabbits with a net and the aid of two intelligent dogs is an easy business, particularly if you do not want many rabbits. And rabbits are easy things to conceal; a man can carry four, two down each trouser leg, one in front of the leg and one behind, and swing along without an appreciable sign of his additional burden. Taking hares with just two dogs, a net and a man is an altogether different business. The net is fixed at the gateway to the field and the man stands by to do the necessary so soon as the animal is in the net. The difficulty comes in training the dogs to turn the hare into the net, for hares are con-

servative animals and have their own exits and entrances to the fields they live in. This means that there must be some reconnaissance beforehand to find the hare's way in and way out. It is the way out that matters—hares will invariably leave a field if they have their own way by the same exit, but they are not so particular about the way of their return as a rule. It might seem that the obvious thing to do is to net this exit, and this is done when the exit is in a good place for the man's own getaway. But the occasions on which it is are remarkably few—the exit is usually in a corner, and a corner is an awkward place to be caught in. So the net is set at the gate. Then one dog is placed at the hare's exit (where he will wait patiently, knowing full well what he has to do) and the other dog is taken round the field to the side opposite the exit and as nearly as possible at the furthest extremity consistent with this from the gate. The man then returns to the gate and when he is ready gives a low whistle. The dog at the exit remains steady, but the other enters the field and puts up the hare. The hare goes for its exit, finds it barred, turns and is instantly between two fires and it does not take two good dogs long to turn it into the gate. Here another difficult point arises, for it is not easy to train two excited dogs not to follow the hare into the net and kill it. The man must do the killing: it saves the net. James's dogs are adept at this business, and James kills a hare with remarkable speed and efficiency, generally before it has time to utter a scream. This, too, is important, for the scream of a hare carries a long way on a still night.

There have been many famous Gypsy fishermen, and Welsh Gypsies, in particular, have earned great renown both as anglers and takers of fish by less conventional methods. It was James, however, who taught me how to take fish from the streams without aid of rod and line, with the hands alone. A nefarious business I admit, but an exciting one. He had two methods, one for use at night and one for use in daylight. At night you use a torch. A torch shining into the water at night seems to have a fatal

fascination for fish. You put the light right down to the water, holding the torch in your left hand. In due course, and generally very soon, a fish will come up to have a look at the light and will hang in the water, almost standing on its tail, as close to the light as it can get. You use your right hand as a scoop, coming up under the fish in one quick movement. I have seen five sizeable fish taken from the water in as many minutes by this method. It is as easy as that—after a great deal of practice. The daylight method is known in England as “tickling,” but by Arigho as guddling. I do not consider James to be a real expert at this very difficult science (it is quite as difficult as catching an educated Test trout on a fly !), for I have seen the real experts, the men who work the hill streams of Wales and the burns and becks of the Border, but he is a very passable imitation of an expert and he does not go without fish when he wants fish for supper.

You must always start guddling at the downstream end of the water you intend to work. The reason for this is that if you startle your fish and fail to take it, it will be off downstream in a flash, frightening all the other fish and ruining your chances for the day. Having selected your water you must next locate your trout. You do this by finding some likely stone and feeling under it for the fish. Once you know your water it is easy to find fish, for there are favourite lies, and if you take a fish from one you can be quite certain that there will be another fish in the same place on the following day, and if you take that one, another the day after. Having found your fish you rub your fingers gently along its tummy. The first touch of your hand on the fish is the most dangerous moment, more often than not it is at the first touch that you lose the fish. Once you have started to rub you are fairly safe, for fish for some unknown reason seem to like having their tummies rubbed (it is not only trout that do : I practised on golden orfe in a garden pond), and if you are not clumsy or too quick you should get the fish. You work your hand gradually up its body with your thumb and forefinger on each side until you

have reached the point where you can thrust thumb and forefinger into the gills. That accomplished the fish cannot escape and you lift it out and kill it. You can, of course, lift the fish out of the water without doing this gill business if the fish is small and you do not want to hurt it. I have lifted many a golden orfe so. But, as you will not be guddling for fun but for food (and, of course, I hope you will not be guddling at all, for I am at heart a law-abiding citizen), it is better to take no chances and to go for his gills. I have experienced many thrills in my lifetime, but there is no thrill to compare with that which comes when first your hand touches a big trout under a stone.

Gypsy crafts are getting fewer with every passing year. Mass production has almost extinguished the Gypsy basket makers, beehive makers and tinsmiths. There is little point in having a kettle repaired when Woolworths or Timothy Whites will produce a new one for as little or less money. So, too, with the beehive makers and the basket makers. The wandering tinsmith, the tinker, is part of Gypsy history, going back pretty well as far as the Gypsy race. The craft of the tinsmith can truly be called a Gypsy craft. But beehive-making and basket-making, in Britain at any rate, are not truly Gypsy crafts. They are British rural crafts that have been adopted by Gypsies. I do not know if there is a single Gypsy beehive-maker left in Britain to-day, though in Charles Kingsley's time several families of them (Lees, Smiths, and Gregories) used to camp on Hartford-bridge Flats in the neighbourhood of Eversley, and Levi Carey and his family used to pursue this craft well into the second decade of the present century. A few Gypsy basket-makers still survive, but they are disappearing fast, and so for that matter is basket-making as a British rural craft. I do not know any Gypsy basket-maker well, and I know very little about Gypsy basket-making, but I do not think that any Gypsy basket-maker has ever equalled in skill either of construction or design the work of British rural craftsmen. Certainly I

have never seen a Gypsy basket to compare with the work turned out by the basket-makers of Deerhurst or Thame or Micheldever or Burley. I do not think that Gypsy basket-makers have ever evolved a design of their own, and even their very considerable knowledge of natural dyes is not Romani knowledge, but the old folk knowledge of the English countryside now largely forgotten by country folk. Even the word commonly used by Gypsy basket-makers for rushes, "junkers," is not a Gypsy word but a distortion of the Latin *Juncus*, a rush : it is not even a Gypsy distortion, for it is the word commonly used by the older Hampshire and Gloucestershire farm labourers. No, basket-making is not a true Gypsy craft, but one of the old village crafts adopted by certain Gypsies. Like most of our village craft it is almost extinct, and it is, therefore, the greater pity that it is also dying out among Gypsies.

I have blamed mass-production for the extinction of these individual crafts. I should have blamed mass-production and the internal combustion engine. Before the Industrial Revolution, which brought a wholesale migration of rural craftsmen into urban factories, basket-making was a whole-time occupation in many English villages : a whole-time occupation because it involved not only the manufacture of baskets, but the ownership or tenancy of withy or osier beds, their cultivation (a specialised and technical job), and the cutting, sorting, stacking and so forth of the rods, jobs which also required specialised knowledge. I believe that at Deerhurst, where a few baskets are still made (though basket-making is now no more than a spare-time occupation), one or two of the villagers still own osier beds, but if this is so the old specialised cultivation has certainly not been maintained. There is, unfortunately, no reason why it should be.

Mass-production sounded the death-knell of rural craftsmanship, but it was the internal combustion engine which drove the nails into its coffin. There can be no craftsmanship without apprenticeship. The internal combustion

engine effectively killed apprenticeship, already sorely wounded by mass-production. The internal combustion engine has been described as the greatest invention of modern times. Undoubtedly it is, for it has done more to alter the mode of life of *homo sapiens* than any other invention in history. But greatest is not synonymous with best. The good that has been accomplished by the internal combustion engine has been far outweighed by the evil, and this is particularly true of the countryside. So between the two great gods of modern life, mass-production and the internal combustion engine, the countryside and the country crafts have been squashed to death. It is a matter of opinion whether or no the towns have been improved.

Basket-making, as I have tried to indicate, was a highly specialised job, requiring technical knowledge of quite a number of things beyond the actual manufacture. The first and all-important condition of any craft is a complete understanding of the materials that are to be used. Now, there are some thirty-five different sorts of osiers suitable for basket-making and there are, in addition, a good many rushes suitable for weaving, and there are—or at any rate there were—a great many different sorts of baskets for which there was a steady demand : fruit baskets, errand boy baskets, coal and wood baskets, travelling hampers, wicker pots, publican's bottles, chaff baskets, lobster pots, eel traps, various sorts of bird traps and so on. All that was not learnt in a day or a year. It was, in fact, a profession to which a boy was apprenticed and in which he remained for the course of his working life. And it was a profession which demanded, particularly, a fixed abode, for the osier beds which were its life-blood needed constant care and attention, having their cycles which must be observed. You do not see cultivated osier beds in Britain nowadays, or very few, and for just the same reason, the decline of woodwork generally, of hurdles and besoms and so forth, the cultivation of birch, hazel and alder woods has declined or ceased. It is for this reason that basket-making

is not truly a Gypsy craft. Spending a lifetime in one place, cultivating sedulously one small patch of osier bed, learning all the different forms of osier and the uses to which they can be put, these things are quite foreign to the nature of the Gypsy. He is a nomad : he must move. Basket-making is, in essence, a sedentary craft. So the Gypsy basket-makers have been, in the main, itinerant handymen, excellent copyists, but not true craftsmen. Yet, even so, they hold—the few of them that are left—the remnants of a great English tradition and the last vestiges of one branch of English rural lore. The many years in which we have put quantity and cheapness before quality and durability have killed most of the English rural crafts. If it is difficult to find a basket-maker nowadays, it is almost equally difficult to find a good thatcher, or stone-roofer, or bodger. Yet the demand has not entirely ceased. It is true there is not the demand there once was for good baskets. Almost anything will do nowadays : look at any shopping crowd, and you will find the women carrying every sort of mass-produced monstrosity. But there is still some small demand for good work and this is met by the few surviving basket-makers. For, let there be no mistake about this, the Gypsy basket-maker, even though he cannot be called a craftsman in the full sense of the word, is an artist, usually in love with his job quite apart from regarding it as one of several means of livelihood, and does go to great pains to produce really good work. Inevitably he suffers in comparison with the sedentary craftsman in that he must pick up his material where and how he can, instead of cultivating his own over a lifetime ; inevitably he suffers in that basket-making, though it may be his main, is not his sole means of livelihood, but in comparison with most of the stuff to be seen about to-day the work he produces is excellent indeed.

Probably the Gypsy basket-maker is doomed to extinction like the Gypsy tinker and beehive maker. Yet in England there will always be sensible people who prefer quality to quantity, and for them there will always be men

to produce. The Gypsy, volatile and shiftless as he is, is yet tenacious. The rural craftsman may be doomed, but the Gypsy will remain, and in him will remain also some, a faint shadow perhaps, but yet some of the old traditional lore and skill of rural England.

Happily one of the oldest of Gypsy crafts is still going strong, in southern England anyway. This is the making of clothes-pegs. The Gypsy still makes better clothes-pegs than anybody else, and he still makes them in just the same way as his forefathers did many years ago. Walter Raymond, in his *English Country Life*, describes a visit he made about 1905 to a family of Gypsy peg-makers encamped in Somerset in the neighbourhood of the Quantock Hills. His book was originally published in 1910 by T. N. Foulis, and a memorial edition was published in 1934 by J. M. Dent and Sons. I have the permission of Messrs. Dent to quote from the chapter on the Gypsy peg-maker in the 1910 edition. The occasion on which it was written is sufficiently long ago to make comparison with modern practice valuable.

When Raymond came on the camp it was late in the evening. It was a small camp: no waggon, just a high two-wheeled cart and two small tents, "neither covering a much greater space than an old-fashioned gig umbrella." At the time of Raymond's arrival only a man was in the camp and he made the author welcome at the fire. "The man sat down on the opposite side. Beside him was a heap of biscuit tins and canisters of all sorts and sizes, and with a pair of long pincers he held them in the fire, melted the solder, and burnt off the paper labels, spread them abroad, and then with a handful of moss and earth, polished the flattened metal.

" 'I suppose you ask at the houses for the empty tins?'

" 'Most often at the shops. We sell more clothes-pegs in towns to the shops. There is no call for them in the villages. They don't use many there. . . . They've got all they want. Pegs last for years. Besides they dry more



on the hedgerows than they do on the line. But take a town now, with gardens shut in by walls—they must have a line there. But then they don't want when we call. They buy at the shops there."

" 'What do you charge for them ?' "

" 'A shilling a gross to the shops.' "

" 'How long does it take to make a gross ?' "

" 'Three gross a day is good work,' said he ; 'but we are up before all the stars are in.' "

Raymond's Gypsy speaks English rather too well perhaps, but what he said then holds good to-day. Gypsies still get most of their tins from the shops (though rubbish tips are by no means neglected) and the method of treating them is just the same, even to the polishing of them with a handful of moss and earth. You can clean old tins—and knives, too, for that matter—better that way than you can with a rag. And still Gypsies sell rather to the shops than to the houses, and in towns rather than in villages. Furthermore, the output is just about the same to-day as it was forty years ago. Three gross in the day was good work then ; a good peg-maker to-day will make about four dozen an hour. Forty-eight pegs an hour makes peg-making sound easy. And, if you should watch a good peg-maker at work (like all experts he will not appear to be hurrying at all), it looks easy enough. But if you try it—and I have—you will find that it is not at all easy.

Raymond noticed in front of one of the tents a stick that had been driven into the ground. It was about 2 inches in diameter and stood about 1 foot high. The Gypsy noticed his interest.

" 'That's to cut off the clothes-pegs on,' said he. He sat down on a bag, which I think was to serve as a mattress, drew a sheath knife, took a willow wand already peeled, and measured the length by means of a piece of hazel cut half through at the right distance and split down to the cut. Then he hammered the knife through the willow, using the stake as a block. He chucked the little 5-inch

piece upon a heap of hundreds of others which he had cut off during the day. 'But they must be dry, and there has been no sun to-day,' said he.

"However, to show me he hammered on the little ring of biscuit tin which prevents the split from going too far under pressure of a clothes-line. Here was the article complete."

The system is still the same. The tools have not altered. A peg-maker needs very few tools—a pair of pincers, a hammer, a stake and a knife and some nails to hold the strip of tin fast to the peg. One nail per peg is generally sufficient (the more nails you have the greater the risk of splitting the wood), but some peg-makers do not use nails at all, merely twisting the ends of the tin strip tight by means of the pliers. The stake—it is called a stale, a stool, a block, and a table in different parts of the country—is made from any bit of sound wood, though beech is probably the most popular, and is generally about a foot high, since that is the most comfortable height for a man sitting down. All peg-makers work sitting down. It is, they maintain, essential to good peg-making to be comfortable. The knife, too, can be any sort of knife. Raymond's Gypsy used a sheath knife, many use old table knives cut down to half their length and sharpened to a degree unknown in un mutilated table knives, and some use ordinary boy-scout folding knives. The one essential thing is that the knife should be sharp. This is for peeling the wands, and I think that this operation (the first in the whole process) is the most difficult for the gorgio to master. Most of us are right-handed, and it is our instinct to hold the knife in the right hand and to move it against the wood which we would hold for preference in our left hand. The Gypsy peg-maker always holds the knife in his left hand, and moves the wood against the knife. He does not move the knife, and he does not move the wood up and down against the knife, but round and round. That is the secret of stripping the willows—all really good pegs are made of willow—and it is by no means an easy one to master.

Indeed, only one factor in the craft of peg-making has changed since Raymond wrote—the price. The Gypsy now gets, or should get, threepence to fourpence a dozen instead of a shilling a gross, which is better—though still not very much—for a trade that is purely a summer trade, since the wood must be dry.

Peg-making is not necessarily a one-man job. Nearly always it is, I think, the man who makes the pegs and the woman who takes them with her when she goes *bikk'ning*, and certainly the man never hawks them. But I know one south country family who all combine in the making of pegs. It is an industry with them, and they have reduced it to a fine art in which each member of the family is a specialist, a cog in one great peg-making machine.

The family consists of Mavky and his wife Orlenda (I have not always in this book used the correct names of living Gypsies, for obvious reasons. Mavky, however, is the correct name of this man. It is a name I have never come across anywhere else, either among Gypsies or gorgie, here or abroad. I think it must be Mafeking, misheard by the parents), his son Daniel and his daughter Alice, his brother Isaac and his wife Miranda and their daughter Defiance. Mavky would sit at the head of the line and round off the sticks. He is the quickest man at this job that I have ever seen, the stick twirling round almost as if it was machine driven and the bark coming off in nice curling strips. Next to him sits his wife with a stake between her outstretched legs, a peg knife in her left hand and a hammer in her right. She sits on the right hand of her husband, picks up his sticks with her left hand (which also holds the knife), places them on the stake and with one sharp blow of her hammer chops them into neat and uncannily accurate 5-inch lengths. (I once measured fifty consecutive choppings done by her. Thirty-nine measured exactly 5 inches, six were just over 5 inches, but not  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches, five were just under 5 inches but over  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches.) Next to her sits Daniel, armed with a pair of

pliers and a pile of strips of tin. He binds the peg, using no nails and working at a pace which, though it cannot keep pace with his mother, is quick enough not to cause a time-lag in the line. Next to him sits Alice—the most silent Gypsy girl I ever met—who picks up the bound pegs and splits each one as neatly as maybe and almost without looking. (Alice's great interest in life is not peg-making, but birds. She knows birds intimately, and wild birds seem to come to her instinctively.) Next to Alice sits Miranda, who shapes the bottom of each peg with some quick cuts before passing it on to her husband, who puts the finishing touches to the job by making the inside bevels. As he drops the pegs, his daughter Defiance, aged nine, picks them up and ties them in bundles of a dozen, arranging them neatly in big hawking baskets. The order of peg making in this family has always been the same whenever I have watched it, but Mavky tells me that it is often altered, that every member of the family, except little Defiance, can undertake any of the jobs. The output is relatively enormous. Much of it is hawked from door to door by Orlenda, Miranda and Alice (though Alice is not good at hawking because she will not talk enough), but at least three big shops take large quantities from time to time, paying threepence a dozen. "A bloody price," says Mavky, "but it's safe, if you understand me, brother."

Another feature of Gypsy life that has been greatly stressed from time to time is the *patteran*, properly the *patrin*. Borrow, of course, brought it to the knowledge of the general public, and the word caught on. It has been over-romanticised by many writers on Gypsies, and it has been astonishingly mis-used by some novelists. In a recent novel by a well-known writer the word has been used to indicate Gypsy talk, presumably the Romani language, the author being apparently under the impression that it is the word from which we get the stage term "patter"! The *patrin* is, of course, the sign left on the road by Gypsies to indicate which way they have taken. It may

be a few leaves, or a stick or two, or a handful of grass, but it is arranged in such a way as to leave a perfectly clear message for those that follow after. The most common form is a cross, thus †, the long arm pointing the way taken. The *patrin* is common to Gypsies all over the world, but has naturally undergone certain local or national developments. In England to-day it is not, I think, much used, certainly to nothing like the same extent as it used to be, and I do not know that there has been much local development away from the ordinary, except among south country Gypsies, and particularly those of Hampshire and the New Forest. Here, development at one time attained an extraordinary degree, and though this has not been maintained at the full it is still very much more complex than anywhere else in Britain. Here, for example, bent sticks are used to indicate travellers on foot, straight sticks to indicate travellers with vans. These sticks are placed a little way from the directional signs. Then branched twigs, or a sprig of heather, or a spray of gorse is laid down to indicate a family with children, and so on. The Gypsy is an extremely observant person and an expert at what is usually termed woodcraft. The *patrin* thus means much more to him than it would to a gorgio. The Gypsy coming upon these signs will know more or less when they were put down and knowing roughly how fast people travel will know pretty well how far ahead his friends are and where he is likely to meet them. At the same time the *patrin* of these New Forest and Hampshire Gypsies varies very much from family to family, so that some of the information contained in the signs is possible of interpretation only by members of the family. All the same, the various family *patrins* do get fairly well known. When with Amos Churen I have more than once come across *patrins* by the wayside, and he has stopped and examined them and then said : "Dey is Patemans," or Lees or Barneys or Stanleys as the case may be.

Similarly, Gypsies read signs in hedgerows and field and lane, or in an evacuated camp, which we would pass over

as being of no significance. One of the main essentials when *pooving* the *grai*—that is putting a horse, without having first obtained permission of the farmer, into a field to graze at night—is to be certain that there is no stock already in the field. It is waste of time walking all over a field in the dark, for you might do so and yet miss stock in it. But if you have not already reconnoitred the ground in daylight you must walk round the field to make sure that there are no gaps in the hedges and that there is only the one gate (for obvious reasons fields with good gates leading on to a lane or a road are to be preferred to any others), and while you are doing this (never walk along a hedge in the dark, that is most unwise ; always walk a yard or so out into the field) you look out for dung. If there are, or have been, horses in the field you will not have to walk far before you find some. Horses are most particular where they excrete and usually choose the borders of the ground they graze. Moreover, a horse will not graze around his droppings, so the grass will be longer there. Cows are not so particular, and you may have to search a while longer for their droppings. A study of the weather during the day, however, will help. Cows always come into the lee of a hedge if it is raining, and generally, but not always, graze into the wind. When you have found the dung, you examine it. If it is warm you have no need to give the field further consideration. But it may be cold and yet fresh enough for the field to be occupied. Fresh dung—that is dung dropped within the last hour or so—crumbles in a certain way.

So, too, examination of an evacuated camp will tell you a lot about the people who have left it. The ashes will tell you within a few hours when they left : the state of the grass how many people were in the camp : the area covered, how they travelled. The position of tents will give you a pretty fair indication of the composition of the party. And all this, coupled with a look at the first *patrin* left by them, will give you almost as much information about them as you can want.

Roadside signs are not, of course, confined to Gypsies. The tramps of the English roads, like the tramps of America, use signs and are very fond of chalk marks on the gate-posts of houses. These marks tell the next man along the road almost all he wants or needs to know about the inhabitants of the house. I, too, have found out quite a lot about some of my neighbours from the signs I have found from time to time on their gate-posts. Tramps also use signs to indicate the way. I found the tramps' camp near Market Harborough and the one near Four Marks in Hampshire by following their signs in the hedges. Tramps have their own lingo, too. It is a queer mixture of back slang, rhyming slang, cant, and Shakespearian English, with a word or two of Romani and Shelta inserted every now and then. In the years immediately before the war a new and most undesirable type was invading the roads of Britain—the young women who “rode the lorries.” They, too, had a lingo of their own, compounded of all the usual elements, together with lorry slang and Americanese from the films. I have not had the opportunity of learning it, but what I did pick up was certainly colourful.

Tramps often look filthy. If they travel the workhouses—and most tramps travel round and round the workhouses in a very restricted area—they are pretty clean, for workhouses are particular and thorough. Gypsies also look dirty more often than not, but those that I have known have been most particular about their personal cleanliness. Appearances are deceptive. The clothes are old and shabby, and this, coupled with a dark or weatherbeaten appearance, a lithe walk, flashing eyes and a suggestion of swagger, has given the Gypsy a reputation for roughness and toughness. That the Gypsy is tough I would not for one moment deny. He is certainly not rough. I have found them a gentle and naturally courteous people. They are very highly strung, and easily roused to anger: they are apt to fight when so roused (and when drunk very apt to fight), but the fire dies down as quickly as it is born. They do not like the gorgio (and they have reasons for their

dislike), but if they take to you they are astonishingly friendly and amazingly loyal and generous. If they do not take to you they are the most unapproachable people on earth. They have an all-abiding love of children. Gypsy children are the happiest (and most spoilt) children in the world. They are very kind to their animals. They have other characteristics too. They cheat, beg, steal—but I do not think they steal more than gorgios, and major crime is almost unknown among them. But no Gypsy has ever attempted to steal from me. They lie as readily, more readily, than they tell the truth. They are an unstable people, living entirely for the moment. But many of their faults are due to persecution—there is much persecution of them in England, the land of the free, for Gypsies do not make good bureaucrats—and I, personally, have not found them any worse than many a gorgio and very much better than some. They have their good points and their bad. They are, in fact, very much as you and me—but they are also foreigners.

Are they dying out in Britain? Borrow thought so a hundred years ago, and Leland thought so fifty years ago. I think not. They have changed since Borrow's day, since Leland's day, and they will change yet more. But they are, I think, very firmly established and very vital. They have in the past fifty years received a considerable influx of new blood from foreign Gypsies (the arrival of foreign Gypsies in this country is usually noticed, but their departure is very rarely recorded, and many remain and are absorbed) and they have shown themselves extremely adaptable. The great revolution that has occurred in Britain in the last hundred years—the enclosures, the spread of industrialisation, mass production, the motor car—these things, if any, should have destroyed the British Gypsies. They have not. The brief prosperity enjoyed by the Romani race in Britain in the last century did them untold harm. Modern conditions, industrialism and the sixpenny bazaar have destroyed that prosperity, have reduced the Gypsies again to poverty, and at the same time have saved them. There



cannot be the slightest doubt that tents and ponies, not living-waggon and a team of piebalds, are the true possessions of the Gypsies. The further they get away from them, the quicker they lose the characteristics of their race. Modern conditions are forcing them to return to the old, their true, way of life.

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